Worlds Full of Signs

Religions in the Graeco-Roman World

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Worlds Full of Signs

Ancient Greek Divination in Context

By

Kim Beerden

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Cover illustration: Owl of Thoms, Italy?, erect owl, 76 cm in height, with a mouse in its left claw. At the base of the statue is an inscription in Greek. The sculpture is made from marble and can be dated to the first century A.D. Although too late for the timespan covered by this book, this image is too splendid not to use: the text is in Greek while the statuette might be from Italy and is certainly standing in a long tradition. Cf. p. 96 n. 181.
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PREFACE

Names of Greek and Roman authors and their works are abbreviated according to the standard practice used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*[2], where necessary supplemented by those in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and the Liddell, Scott and Jones Greek dictionary. The Akkadian texts are in the editions of the online edition of the State Archives of Assyria (SAA) series (Knowledge and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire at Oracc, February 2013), unless otherwise indicated. In rendering the Greek and Latin I have used the editions of the Oxford Classical Texts (Budé or Teubner if no OCT was available). Translations are from the Loeb Classical Library series, unless otherwise indicated.

This book is a revised version of my dissertation (Leiden, defended in February 2013) which was supervised by Luuk de Ligt. I am grateful to those involved in the process of writing this dissertation, especially Frits Naerebout, and those partaking in the opposition committee at my defense. I thank Marjolein van Asselt (University of Maastricht and Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) for reading and commenting upon earlier drafts of all chapters. Our ensuing discussions have stimulated my research immensely. Nina Faas (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) commented on chapters 1 and 8. Interdisciplinary research cannot exist without the generous help of those at home in the comparanda: I have profited much from Ulla Koch's expertise, who has kindly read—and commented upon—my drafts and answered many questions, both big and small, on Assyriological matters. Jeanette Fincke kindly allowed me to participate in a class on divination in 2009–2010. Henk Versnel has been very encouraging in the final stages of writing—and in stimulating me to submit this manuscript to Brill. Anders Lisdorf provided me with as yet unpublished work. Jaap-Jan Flinterman, Matthijs de Jong and Jürgen Zangenberg read the final draft of the dissertation and made valuable suggestions for improvement. Of course, any remaining faults are my own.

No work can be done without a pleasant working environment: my colleagues at the Institute for History at Leiden University and at the University of Amsterdam have been key to this, stimulating my work by means of many conversations and discussions.

I have enjoyed the hospitality of the Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut in Rome for a number of weeks while editing my PhD thesis and I am grateful for the financial generosity of the Institute for History at Leiden when I was preparing this manuscript for publication.

Permission to use the image on the cover of this book was granted by the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities/Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden).

Kim Beerden
Leiden, March 2013

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	L'Antiquité Classique
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
AJP	American Journal of Philology
AnnRevAnth	Annual Review of Anthropology
ANRW	H. Temporini & W. Haase (eds), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (Berlin 1972–)
Ant	Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients)
APhA	American Philological Association
Areth	Arethusa. A Journal of the Well-springs of Western Man
ARW	Archiv für Religionswissenschaft
AS	L'Année Sociologique
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BMCR	Bryn Mawr Classical Review
CAD	I.J. Gelb et al. (eds), *The Assyrian dictionary of The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago 1956–)
Centaurus	Centaurus. An International Journal of the History of Science and its Cultural Aspects
Chiron	Chiron. Mitteilungen der Kommission für alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts
CJ	Classical Journal
CQ	Classical Quarterly
CSSH	Comparative Studies in Society and History
CurrAnthr	Current Anthropology
CW	Classical World
H&T	History and Theory
Hermathena	Hermathena: a Series of Papers on Literature, Science and Philosophy
HrwG	H. Cancik et al. (eds), *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* vols. 5 (Stuttgart 1988–2001)
HSClPh	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual

Iraq	Iraq. British School of Archaeology in Iraq
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JEOL	Jaarbericht van het Voor-Aziatisch-Egyptisch-Gezelschap (from 1945: Genootschap) 'Ex Oriente Lux'
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JIH	Journal of Interdisciplinary History
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPE	Journal of Public Economics
JRAI	Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JRR	Journal of Risk Research
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
Kernos	Kernos. Revue Internationale et Pluridisciplinaire de Religion Grecque Antique
Klio	Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte
Ktèma	Ktèma. Civilisations de l'Orient, de la Grèce et de Rome antiques
Lampas	Lampas. Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Classici
Leidschrift	Leidschrift. Historisch Tijdschrift
Métis	Métis. Revue d'Anthropologie du Monde Grec Ancien: Philologie—Histoire—Archéologie.
MTSR	Method and Theory in the Study of Religion
Nature	Nature. International Weekly Journal of Science
NewP	H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds), *Brill's New Pauly Online*
Numen	Numen. International Review for the History of Religions
OLZ	Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
Orientalia	Orientalia
PBSR	Papers of the British School at Rome
Persica	Persica. Jaarboek van het Genootschap Nederland-Iran
RE	A.F. von Pauly et al. (eds), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart 1894–1997)
REA	Revue des Études Anciennes
RevPhil	Revue de Philologie, de Littérature et d'Histoire Anciennes
RHR	Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
RJb	Romanistisches Jahrbuch
RlA	E. Ebeling et al. (eds), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin 1932–)

RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali
Science	Science
SPAW	Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Phil.-hist. Kl.
Syria	Syria. Revue d'Art Oriental et d'Archéologie
Talanta	Talanta. Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society
ThesCRA	J.Ch. Balty et al. (eds), *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* vols. 5 (Los Angeles 2004–)
Viator	Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies
WSt	Wiener Studien. Zeitschrift für classische Philologie
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete (from 1939: und vorderasiatische Archäologie)
ZPhF	Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung
ZVS	Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty is an ambivalent feeling: human beings need it but try to diminish it at the same time. Uncertainty stimulates individuals to try to obtain the knowledge they feel is necessary to make the right decision in a particular situation. In order to develop this (supposed) knowledge, which can relate to past, present or future, external input is required. Data and interpretations of those data are needed to make sense of the world. For this, we may turn to specialists, such as psychologists, journalists or economists. Their external input allows us to think about the situation in which we find ourselves. This facilitates decision making: external input reduces uncertainty because we consider ourselves to be guided by reliable information.[1] In the ancient world, an important part of this external input was provided by divination: the acknowledgement and interpretation of signs thought to have come from the supernatural. The outcomes of divination induced a sense of certainty, facilitating the decisions which had to be made in daily life.

In this study, I address the question of what is specific to the omnipresent phenomenon of Greek divination and why this might be so. My principal strategy will be to place Greek divination in a wider context by comparing it with divination in Republican Rome and Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia. Although this research set-up is wide-ranging, it should be borne in mind that Classical and Hellenistic Greece are the ultimate focus of my explorations.

Choices

The first choice made by the historian is that of subject. Divination is a phenomenon which is worthy of enquiry because it was prevalent in all known ancient societies and touched upon the lives of individuals as diverse as kings, warriors, traders, farmers and slaves. Divination pervaded daily life: a very usual way for the supernatural to manifest itself, or so it was thought, was by means of divinatory signs. Theoretically, all that was

[1] Although in the end there will always be uncertainty and inconsistency, cf. H.S. Versnel, *TER UNUS: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: three studies in henotheism* (Leiden 1990) 1–35.

needed was a human interpretation of these supernatural signs, possibly with the aid of text, as a result of which man gained knowledge. Consequently, the divinatory materials are not only revealing about the practices of divination itself, but are among the few materials which reveal the perceived actions of the supernatural. It is for these two reasons that divination is among the most important phenomena available for the study of ancient religion. My aim is to undertake a systematic investigation of what divination was and the different ways in which it could function. My chief target is the daily experience of divination rather than any philosophical reflections on signs and divinatory practices.

While the choice of subject is the first step, the second decision to be made is that of approach. The research set-up in this study is comparative: there were rich varieties of practices and ideas inherent in divination in the three cultural areas under consideration—and at the same time intimate similarities can be discerned. Comparison requires a degree of decontextualization of the phenomenon: divination is recontextualized in Greek society in the conclusion. Although the comparative approach implies a wide geographical scope, it is also restrictive because a comparison is only effective when the framework within which it is conducted is well defined.

Therefore, structure is the historian's third choice. I have chosen to concentrate on the three constitutive elements and on the main function of divination. I consider the three elements to be the sign, the diviner (*homo divinans*) and the texts that may be used in the divinatory process. The principal function of divination relates to time and to uncertainty. I must emphasize that my purpose is not to provide a descriptive overview of all divinatory methods in the three cultural areas. Conforming to the approach advocated by Poole, the current work does not seek "[…] analytic disclosure *in toto* […]. Instead, each case presents […] a partial coherence among its metaphors and analogies that may tell us something new, interesting, and even theoretically important."[2] This work is, then, concerned with aspects of the larger phenomenon of divination.

One final choice which still has to be made is that between a diachronic or synchronic approach. I have adopted a synchronic approach: a certain degree of generalization is necessary to say something about, for example, 'divination in Republican Rome'. In adopting this approach,

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[2] F.J.P. Poole, 'Metaphors and maps: towards comparison in the anthropology of religion', *JAAR* 54 (1986) 411–457, at 433.

I certainly do not wish to deny the dynamism which was so very prevalent in ancient religions. Nevertheless, in this way a feature of divination can be pointed out in one area in comparison to that in another. Without this leeway, the historian could not discuss anything but the specific. At the same time, generalization should not go too far. Hence, time and place are restricted here to Republican Rome in its Italian setting; Greece in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods; and Mesopotamia in Neo-Assyrian times (cf. pp. 44–46 for a further discussion of the geographical and temporal scope).

Having made these choices, I can only hope to have fulfilled to some extent the three very ambitious requirements Jonathan Z. Smith considers crucial to a successful study of religion: "first, that the exemplum has been well and fully understood. This requires a mastery of both the relevant primary material and the history and tradition of its interpretation. Second, that the exemplum be displayed in the service of some important theory, some paradigm, some fundamental question, some central element in the academic imagination of religion. Third, that there be some method for explicitly relating the exemplum to the theory, paradigm, or question and some method for evaluating each in terms of the other."[3] In my attempt to fulfil these three conditions I use the comparative method to investigate divination—an important subject in itself—and relate it to the context of the societies in which it took place, hoping to provide some new impetus to ideas about the workings of ancient religion and its place in society.

Outline of This Volume

This book is divided into three parts. Part I provides an introduction to the comparative study of divination. In chapter 1, a brief historiographical outline of research into divination, both in the field of Classical Studies and of Assyriology, is provided. I shall show that the current revival of divination studies revolves around the idea that divination can be used to obtain an understanding of such aspects of daily life as, for example, decision making. Divination is now seen as essentially a human act which tells us about human society. This is an anthropocentric approach which is also pursued throughout the chapters of this volume: according to the definition of divination, as formulated in chapter 2, human individuals

[3] J.Z. Smith, *Imagining religion: from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago 1982) xi–xii.

have to recognize a sign as such, interpret it with the aid of oral or written texts and act on it. Chapter 3 discusses arguments in favour of taking a comparative approach and points out the units of comparison used in this study, while drawing attention to some methodological pitfalls. Part I shows that divination can be usefully conceptualized and analysed as a process consisting of three elements—present in all three cultural areas—*homo divinans*, sign and text.

Part II discusses the three elements of divination identified in the first part of the study. Chapter 4 deals with the *homo divinans* and, in first instance, is concerned with the question: when was an expert needed and when could an individual divine for himself? However, the major part of the chapter is devoted to what can be said about the role of this expert on the basis of a systematic comparison of the socio-economic status of certain groups of divinatory experts in Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome. Conclusions about differences and similarities in socio-economic status contribute to an understanding of diversity among experts and consequently to the diversity in the element of the *homo divinans*. The sign is the topic of chapter 5: where were signs perceived to come from? How did an individual obtain a sign? How could these occurrences be recognized as being actual signs from the supernatural? These questions must be addressed because these are all preliminary stages to the human recognition of a sign, the first—pivotal—step in the divinatory process as outlined in chapter 1. Chapter 6 deals with the texts used in the divinatory ritual. The contents of the text are not discussed as such: instead, texts are analysed as cultural objects which had a function, or various functions, in the divinatory process. Examination of the categories of text contributes to our understanding of what went on during the divinatory process in the three cultural areas, thereby helping us to see more clearly what was specific to Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divinatory practices.

Part III deals with divination in relation to its main function. Divination is discussed in relation to experiences of time (past, present and future) and as a way to deal with uncertainty—two intertwined issues. Chapter 7 deals with central questions regarding time: how was time made explicit in the divinatory sources? How did divination illuminate past, present and future? Divination served as a tool to obtain knowledge about what occurs within a timeframe—but this raises the questions of how long this timeframe might be and what this tells us about divination. Chapter 8 is concerned with uncertainties and how ancient man dealt with these through divinatory practice. Intriguingly, a comparison shows that uncertainties were dealt with quite differently in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome.

Taken as a whole, these chapters allow an insight into what was general and what was specific to divination in Greece: while remaining part of one and the same phenomenon, divination developed a different face in each cultural area in which it manifested itself.[4] I am especially concerned with the face of Greek divination and its relation to society: Greek divination was characterized by a striking degree of flexibility on a number of levels, which might have been the outcome of a relative under-institutionalization. What is equally important, however, is that the cultural variations within one and the same phenomenon are shown. While the ancient worlds had much in common, plurality was always present, even within divination: practices of divination are constituted differently every time.

[4] While I am aware of the debates surrounding the term 'culture' (see F.G. Naerebout & M.J. Versluys, ' "L'acculturation n'est qu'un mot." Cultuurcontact en acculturatieprocessen in de oudheid: een inleiding', *Leidschrift* 21 (2006) 7–23, at 13–15 and references), I simply use E.B. Tylor's definition of culture: "The complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (*Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom* (London 1871) 1).

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT DIVINATION

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Divination was omnipresent in the ancient world: "if the ancient Mediterranean world was full of gods, it was full of their messages as well."[1] The mindset of ancient individuals might even be described as a state of 'omen-mindedness', as is testified by the amount and nature of the ancient evidence.[2] We know that everyone—from king to slave—was a potential user of divination. Public (official) and private (unofficial) divination, with or without an expert, was very common. If an expert was used, individuals would either consult a local expert or travel great distances in order to satisfy their need for expertise.[3]

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[1] D.E. Aune et al., 'Divination and prophecy' in: S.I. Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the ancient world: a guide* (Cambridge, MA 2004) 370–391, at 371. "[…] it was full of their *signs* as well" would be more appropriate. After all, the sign is the occurrence perceived to be produced by the supernatural. Cf. pp. 21–24 for the crucial role of man in the recognition and interpretation of a sign (which is turned into a message).

[2] The term was coined by S.M. Freedman in: *If a city is set on a height: the Akkadian omen series Šumma alu ina mēlê šakin* vol. 1 (Philadelphia 1998–2006) 1. The term captures the state of mind ancient individuals must have been in, in the sense of being always on the look-out for a possible sign from the supernatural (cf. pp. 22–24). The word 'omen' is not used in what follows because I consider the meaning of this word to be too restricted (in Graeco-Roman studies it usually refers to unprovoked signs only) and also too wide (it can refer to a text as well as to a sign in Assyriological studies). Instead, I have opted to use 'sign'.

[3] E. Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires de Dodone* (Genève 2006) 329–335; 363–406. A discussion of those consulting Klaros is H.W. Pleket, 'Tempel en orakel van Apollo in Klaros', *Hermeneus* 66 (1994) 143–151, at 147–148—individuals from around 50 cities consulted the oracle, coming long distances but notably not from Greek cities on the islands or the coast of Asia Minor. See also *SEG* 37, 961–980 for a list of towns coming to the oracle (from 128 AD to 177 AD). For those consulting at Didyma see J.E. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's oracle, cult, and companions* (Berkeley 1988) 104–105. For a very insightful article on context of oracles see C. Morgan, 'Divination and society at Delphi and Didyma', *Hermathena* 147 (1989) 17–42. For those travelling to Delphi see M. Arnush, 'Pilgrimage to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi: patterns of public and private consultation' in: J. Elsner & I. Rutherford (eds), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and early Christian antiquity* (Oxford 2005) 97–110. See on Koropaios L. Robert, 'Sur l'oracle d'Apollon Koropaios' in: idem, *Hellenica: recueil d'épigraphie, de numismatique et d'antiquités grecques* vol. 5 (Paris 1948) 16–28, at 21. For parallels and on travelling to oracles more generally see V. Rosenberger, 'Reisen zum Orakel: Griechen, Lyder und Perser als Klienten hellenischer Orakelstätten' in: M. Witte & S. Alkier (eds), *Die Griechen und der Vordere Orient: Beiträge zum Kultur- und Religionskontakt zwischen Griechenland und dem Vorderen Orient im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Göttingen 2003) 25–58.

The principal focus of this study is divination in Greece and—to a lesser extent—in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia and the Roman Republic, but modern scholarship covers virtually all areas for which ancient sources are available.[4]

Past Scholarship

During the past 120 years, ancient historians have produced a large number of studies on Greek and Roman divination—these being discussed together as well as separately. Their efforts are paralleled by those of many colleagues in the field of Assyriology who have built extensive datasets about Mesopotamian divination since the late 1890s. Nevertheless, the study of the phenomenon in the fields of ancient history and Assyriology has developed in a relatively isolated fashion: interpretations and conceptualizations of divination have only incidentally been passed on from scholars of the Graeco-Roman world to Assyriologists, and vice-versa.[5] In what follows I shall offer a brief chronological synthesis of the developments in both fields of research, with the dual aim of highlighting current issues and identifying relatively unexplored roads in the study of divination.

Divination has invited analysis ever since Antiquity. The earliest surviving treatise containing extensive reflections on this topic is Cicero's *De divinatione*, which is primarily concerned with, what were to him

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[4] The following serves merely to give an impression the various fields of ancient divination around the Mediterranean: titles on the Levant, in addition to those mentioned in p. 45 n. 1 are: L.L. Grabbe, *Priests, prophets, diviners, sages: a socio-historical study of religious specialists in ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, FA 1995); J. Blenkinsopp, *Sage, priest, prophet: religious and intellectual leadership in ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY 1995); J.G. Gammie & L.G. Perdue (eds), *The sage in Israel and the ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IND 1990). Further studies on ancient Israel and its neighbours: C. Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: a means of revelation in ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IND 1997); F.H. Cryer, *Divination in ancient Israel and its Near Eastern environment: a socio-historical investigation* (Sheffield 1994); A. Jeffers, *Magic and divination in ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden 1996). There is an excellent overview article on Egyptian divination: A. von Lieven, 'Divination in Ägypten', *AoF* 26 (1999) 77–126. One area which has recently been investigated in depth is divination by dreams, e.g., K. Szpakowska, *Behind closed eyes: dreams and nightmares in ancient Egypt* (Swansea 2003). For an overview and further references on Hittite divination see Th.P.J. van der Hout, 'Orakel (Oracle). B. Bei den Hethitern', *RlA* 10 (2003) 118–124.

[5] Fortunately, there are indications that this is changing. I refer to publications such as A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010), *passim*. See also K. Beerden, 'Review of: "Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world" ', *BMCR* 2011.01.32 (http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-01-32.html). Visited 27-07-2011.

familiar, Roman practices. The influence of his classification of divinatory methods and thoughts on the validity of divination is still clearly visible today. A limited but steady output of scholarly works on divination in the Graeco-Roman world and beyond can be observed throughout the ages, with a special emphasis on astrology (an condemnation thereof). In a response to the innovations introduced by nineteenth-century scholarship, the study of divination was reinvigorated and a major publication appeared: Auguste Bouché-Leclercq's *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*. The aim of this author was to obtain an insight into ancient mindsets by studying divinatory methods and practices in great detail, in the process of which he collected a huge amount of source material, paying particular attention to the experts involved in the divinatory process.[6] In his work, he performed any past and present modern student of divination a great service. In fact, his work has recently been reprinted and can still be considered to be the standard work on Graeco-Roman divination.

One of the twentieth-century scholars who followed up on Bouché-Leclercq's work, William Halliday, approached the topic from a different angle, emphasizing the development of the particular divinatory methods in the contexts of 'positive magic' and irrational practices, even though divination was seen to be founded on 'intelligible foundations'.[7] After Halliday, a relative silence fell among ancient historians until the 1950s. In the course of the last sixty-five years or so, Greek and Roman epigraphic evidence—for example in the shape of materials from oracle sites—has become more widely available, thereby providing new possibilities for research.[8] Not only have in-depth studies about particular divinatory methods begun to appear, but rather more general works of a systematic and critical nature have also been published.[9]

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[6] On his ideas and aspirations see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* vol. 1 (Paris 1879) 1–5.

[7] W.R. Halliday, *Greek divination: a study of its methods and principles* (Chicago 1913) 272.

[8] G. Rougemont, 'Apports de l'épigraphie à l'histoire grecque: l'example des oracles' in: Y. Le Bohec & Y. Roman (eds), *Épigraphie et histoire: acquis et problèmes* (Lyon 1998) 71–76.

[9] Examples of important titles from the 1950s and 1960s are H. Popp, *Die Einwirkung von Vorzeichen, Opfern und Festen auf die Kriegführung der Griechen im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Würzburg 1959); R. Crahay, *La littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* (Paris 1956); R. Flacelière, *Devins et oracles grecs* (Paris 1961); H.W. Parke, *Greek oracles* (London 1967); H.W. Parke, *The oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (London 1967); A. Caquot & M. Leibovici (eds), *La divination: études* 2 vols (Paris 1968); R. Bloch, *Les prodiges dans l'antiquité classique: Grèce, Étrurie et Rome* (Paris 1963); P. Kett, *Prosopographie der historischen griechischen Manteis bis auf die Zeit Alexanders des Grossen* (PhD thesis,

Since the very beginnings of the discipline of Assyriology, many of its scholars have occupied themselves with the study of divination because of its prominence in the sources.[10] In his *The religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, appearing less than a decade after the *Histoire de la divination*, Morris Jastrow presents one of the first great Assyriological overviews.[11] Developments in the field of Assyriology continued: Georges Contenau's important publication on divination reflects the developments in scholarship in general and more specifically those in Assyriology.[12] The great scholar of the generation after Contenau, A. Leo Oppenheim, produced a number of sophisticated, innovative articles in which he both published cuneiform tablets and also contextualized these texts.[13] The early 1960s witnessed a renewed Assyriological interest in divination, culminating in the 1965 international meeting of Assyriologists being dedicated to the topic.[14] It should be noted that during these years, many Assyriologists tended to give priority to the publication of the cuneiform tablets rather than to the analysis of their contents in a social context. Still, as a result of a steady output of publications, transliterations and translations of individual tablets, a solid foundation for the study of divinatory practices was built up in discipline of Assyriology—and the corpus of texts continues to expand each year as there is still an abundance of unpublished materials available.

Both in Classical studies and in Assyriology, an empirical and evolutionary approach to divination has given way to a more analytical view. Many scholars used to see divination as a speculative practice, but they

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Erlangen-Nürnberg 1966); F. Luterbacher, *Der Prodigienglaube und Prodigienstil der Römer: eine historisch-philologische Abhandlung* (Darmstadt 1967²); P.L. Schmidt, *Iulius Obsequens und das Problem der Livius-Epitome: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der lateinischen Prodigienliteratur* (Mainz 1968).

[10] For Assyriological publications up to 1975 see R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur* 3 vols (Berlin 1967–1975). For publications after 1975, it is best to browse the overviews of literature in the *Archiv für Orientforschung* series.

[11] M. Jastrow, *The religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston 1898) 328–407.

[12] G. Contenau, *La divination chez les Assyriens et les Babyloniens* (Paris 1940).

[13] A.L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the ancient Near East, with a translation of an Assyrian dream-book* (Philadelphia 1956) 179–373; A.L. Oppenheim, 'Perspectives on Mesopotamian divination' in: J. Nougayrol et al. (eds), *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines* (Paris 1966) 35–43; A.L. Oppenheim, 'New fragments of the Neo-Assyrian dream-book', *Iraq* 31 (1969) 153–165; A.L. Oppenheim, 'Divination and celestial observation in the last Assyrian empire', *Centaurus* 14 (1969) 97–135; A.L. Oppenheim, 'A babylonian diviner's manual', *JNES* 33 (1974) 197–220.

[14] The publication resulting from the 1965 *Rencontre* is: Nougayrol, *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne*.

have started to perceive it as a rational system: in Jean-Pierre Vernant's collection of essays titled *Divination et rationalité*, divination was, for the first time, *explicitly* studied as such by both ancient historians and Assyriologists.[15] The publication of this book marks an important watershed in the study of divination because it heralds a key change in attitude. Whereas divination had been considered an 'irrational' feature of religious life, which could not be fully understood by modern man, it was now emphatically being seen as a practice inviting rational analysis. This change in emphasis and approach is striking and has produced a renewed output of publications approaching divination in relation to such topics as ancient philosophy, warfare and politics.

The Present Revival

In recent years another revival of the study of classical, primarily Greek, divination has been taking shape. This trend is exemplified by the articles brought together by Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter Struck in their publication *Mantikê*.[16] Johnston's views on what she considers to be a general dearth of classical scholarship on divination and the reason for the current revitalization are intriguing because of the shift in views about divination she has deduced. Her argument is that initially divination could not profit from the rising interest in Greek religion because it has often been, and sometimes still is, classified as 'magic' (my inverted commas). This classification tied in nicely with the idea which saw divination as an 'irrational' practice. Since 'magic' did not become a mainstream research area until the 1960s, scholarship on divination remained scarce. Even in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when 'magic' became more popular, divination remained under-examined because it was not a 'dark enough' topic for those interested in 'magic'. Recently, the view that research into 'magic'—and any phenomenon one chooses to classify as such—has to be about 'dark magic' has begun to shift. Johnston states that this change in attitude, in conjunction with the novel perception of divination as a rational part of religious systems, is the main driving force behind the present

[15] J.P. Vernant et al., *Divination et rationalité* (Paris 1974).

[16] S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005). See also the special issue of the *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 224 (2007).

revival: scholars of both magic and of religion now regard divination as a potential object of study.[17]

Some issues which have recently been reinvestigated are formalized oracular practices and their role in politics and society. Did divination actually make a difference or was it a mere formality?[18] A connected theme is the study of scepticism about, and manipulation of, divination—which has received ample attention, especially by those concerned with Roman practices.[19] Even now, compared to the formal rituals, the more private and unofficial divinatory practices are still relatively unexplored territory. Nevertheless, there have been a number of recent publications on this topic.[20]

Furthermore, an apparent shift from an emic ('from the native's point of view') to a more etically orientated ('from the academic's point of view') divinatory model has occurred.[21] In the emic model, divination is

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[17] S.I. Johnston, 'Introduction: divining divination' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 1–28, at 1–10. For similar thoughts: G.E.R. Lloyd, *The ambitions of curiosity: understanding the world in ancient Greece and China* (Cambridge 2002) 19–20.

[18] J. Linderski, 'Cicero and Roman divination' in: idem, *Roman questions: selected papers* vol. 1 (Stuttgart 1995) 458–484; J. Linderski, 'Watching the birds: Cicero the augur and the augural temple' in: ibidem, 485–495; B. MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation: a study in religion and politics in Republican Rome* (Brussels 1982). For Greece see R. Parker, *Polytheism and society at Athens* (Oxford 2005), especially 108–123; R. Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles' in: R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford readings in Greek religion* (Oxford 2000) 76–108, revised version of R. Parker, 'Greek states and oracles' in: P.A. Cartledge & F.D. Harvey (eds), *Crux: essays presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix* (Exeter 1985) 298–326; H. Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic oracle: divination and democracy* (Cambridge 2005).

[19] On scepticism see for Greece, among others: J.D. Mikalson, *Honor thy gods: popular religion in Greek tragedy* (Chapel Hill 1991) 97–101; and for Rome among others W.V. Harris, 'Roman opinions about the truthfulness of dreams', *JRS* 93 (2003) 18–34 or the many publications on Cicero's *De divinatione*.

[20] Recent contributions on informal practices (there are many more publications): F. Graf, 'Rolling the dice for an answer' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 51–97; W.E. Klingshirn, 'Christian divination in late Roman Gaul: the s*ortes sangallenses*' in: iidem, 99–128; C. Grottanelli, '*Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata*: literary texts and lot inscriptions as sources for ancient cleromancy' in: iidem, 129–146. See also a number of the articles in *Kernos* 3 (Actes du colloque 'Oracles et mantique en Grèce ancienne') (1990).

[21] The terms etic and emic, borrowed from anthropological studies, signify the difference between the language and definitions which the researcher uses (etic) and the language the object of study uses (emic). Etic language and definitions function as tools with which the researcher can tackle his study in a 'neutral' way. Naturally, etic language should remain closely connected to emic experience. Cf. F.G. Naerebout, *Attractive performances. Ancient Greek dance: three preliminary studies* (Amsterdam 1997) 155–158. See also, among many others, M. Harris, 'History and significance of the emic/etic distinction', *AnnRevAnth* 5 (1976) 329–350 and more recently T. Headland, K.L. Pike & M. Harris (eds), *Emics and etics: the insider/outsider debate* (Newbury Park 1990).

considered to be communication from the supernatural to men.[22] The models using an etic orientation tend to emphasize divination as a religious phenomenon in which the human individual fulfils the central role. In this model, the supernatural does not play an active role in the divinatory process. The shift to stress the important position of human individuals in divinatory practice has paved the way for divination to be incorporated into studies dealing with human mentality and social issues: subjects like risk management and the divinatory expert spring to mind. Esther Eidinow, for example, uses two different types of epigraphic sources, oracle tablets (from the sanctuary at Dodona) and curse tablets, in order to illustrate the ways Greek individuals perceived risk, both in the present and the future.[23] Michael Flower takes the Greek *mantis* as his central figure of research and analyses his role in society and the various themes related to this role, such as his actual influence on Greek warfare. In other publications, the Roman expert receives attention.[24] These examples illustrate the latest developments in classical scholarship.

The recent upsurges of interest in Greek and Roman divination have been paralleled by more or less independent developments in the field of Assyriology. Because most Assyriologists are very specialized, scholarly productions in this field tend to take the form of detailed studies discussing one specific method of divination only. Extispicy has received a large

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[22] Communication is the transmission of information between two entities or from one to the other. This does not necessarily involve simultaneity. For a concise summary of a number of models of, and approaches to, communication see M. Burgoon, F.G. Hunsaker & E.J. Dawson, *Human communication* (Thousand Oaks 1994[3]) 18–34.

[23] E. Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk among the ancient Greeks* (Oxford 2007). I do not use the term 'risk' to investigate the ancient world myself, as I do not think it a useful concept with which to pursue the study of ancient divination with. Cf. pp. 196–203.

[24] M.A. Flower, *The seer in ancient Greece* (Berkeley 2008); also on this topic: R. Garland, 'Priests and power in Classical Athens' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 75–91; J.N. Bremmer, 'The status and symbolic capital of the seer' in: R. Hägg (ed.), *The role of religion in the early Greek polis: proceedings from the third international seminar on ancient Greek cult: organized by the Swedish institute at Athens, 16–18 October 1992* (Stockholm 1996) 97–109. For the central role of the Roman *homo divinans*: V. Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*: controlling the Res Publica' in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *A companion to Roman religion* (2007) 292–303; J. North, 'Diviners and divination at Rome' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 51–71. See for the most recent publications in the Graeco-Roman branch of divinatory studies Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*; R. Stoneman, *The ancient oracles: making the gods speak* (New Haven 2011); S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012).

amount of attention,[25] as has astrology.[26] Lately, prophecy has emerged as a focal point of research.[27] Furthermore, (parts of) compendia of ominous signs have been published in accessible form.[28] However, as already noted above, synthesis has been lagging behind. To date Jean Bottéro's contribution to Vernant's *Divination et rationalité* remains the most comprehensive synthetic article on Mesopotamian divination.[29] During the past couple of decades, however, there has been a shift in attitudes: a contextualization of divination in Mesopotamian culture has begun to take place. Scholars

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[25] An excellent overview is offered by the following: U. Jeyes, 'The act of extispicy in ancient Mesopotamia: an outline' in: I.M. Diakonoff et al. (eds), *Assyriological miscellanies* I (Copenhagen 1980) 13–32; J. Aro, 'Remarks on the practice of extispicy in the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal' in: J. Nougayrol et al. (eds), *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines* (Paris 1966) 109–117; I. Starr, 'In search of principles of prognostication in extispicy', *HUCA* 45 (1974) 17–23; J.W. Meyer, *Untersuchungen zu den Tonlebermodellen aus dem Alten Orient* (Kevelaer 1987); U. Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy: omen texts in the British Museum* (Istanbul 1989); a very anatomically oriented study is R. Leiderer, *Anatomie der Schafsleber im babylonischen Leberorakel: eine makroskopisch-analytische Studie* (München 1990); one of the standard works of reference for study of the liver compendia is U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens: the chapters Manzāzu, Padānu and Pān tākalti of the Babylonian extispicy series mainly from Aššurbanipal's library* (Copenhagen 2000); as well as U.S. Koch, *Secrets of extispicy: the chapter Multābiltu of the Babylonian extispicy series and Niṣirti bārûti texts mainly from Aššurbanipal's library* (Münster 2005); U. Koch-Westenholz, 'Old Babylonian extispicy reports' in: C. Wunsch (ed.), *Mining the archives: Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the occasion of his 60th birthday, 4 October 2002* (Dresden 2002) 131–145; J.C. Fincke, 'Ist die Mesopotamische Opferschau ein nächtliches Ritual?', *BiOr* 66 (2009) 519–558; J.J. Glassner, 'Le corps de la victime dans la sacrifice divinatoire' in: G. Barjamovic et al. (eds), *Akkade is King: a collection of papers by friends and colleagues presented to Aage Westenholz on occasion of his 70th birthday 15th of May 2009* (Copenhagen) 143–150.

[26] U. Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology: an introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian celestial divination* (Copenhagen 1995). And more recently: F. Rochberg, *The heavenly writing: divination, horoscopy, and astronomy in Mesopotamian culture* (Cambridge 2004); H. Hunger, *Astrological reports to Assyrian kings* (SAA 8) (Helsinki 1992); D. Pingree, *From astral omens to astrology: from Babylon to Bīkāner* (Rome 1997); E. Reiner, 'The uses of astrology', *JAOS* 105 (1985) 589–595.

[27] S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (SAA 9) (Helsinki 1997); J.G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité: actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 15–17 juin 1995* (Paris 1997); M. Nissinen, *References to prophecy in Neo-Assyrian sources* (Helsinki 1998); M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian perspectives* (Atlanta 2000); M. Weippert, '"König, fürchte dich nicht!" Assyrische Prophetie im 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.', *Orientalia* 71 (2002) 1–54; M. Nissinen, *Prophets and prophecy in the ancient Near East* (Atlanta 2003).

[28] See volumes such as E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (Locust Valley, NY 1970); Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*; E. Gehlken, *Weather omens of Enūma Anu Enlil: thunderstorms, wind and rain* (*tablets 44–49*) (Leiden 2012).

[29] J. Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne' in: J.P. Vernant et al., *Divination et rationalité* (Paris 1974) 70–195. The most recent overview is S.M. Maul, 'Omina und Orakel. A. Mesopotamien', *RlA* 10 (2006) 45–88.

have started to explore the influence of extispicy on social and economic aspects, and have generally approached divination more theoretically.[30]

All in all, the focus of the modern study of ancient divination has fundamentally changed character on two levels. First, divination has become a rational, instead of an irrational, subject of study. Second, a progression from systematization and publication of materials towards a more analytical approach to divination can be discerned in both Assyriology and Classical studies. Divination has become a means to obtain a better understanding of human societies.

[30] Koch discusses (especially) extispicy in the context of cognitive religion: U.S. Koch, 'Three strikes and you're out! A view on cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 43–59 but see also the theoretical work of other scholars: N. Veldhuis, 'Divination: theory and use' in: A.K. Guinan et al. (eds), *If a man builds a joyful house: assyriological studies in honour of Erle Verdun Leichty* (Leiden 2006) 487–497; S. Richardson, 'Ewe should be so lucky: extispicy reports and everyday life' in: C. Wunsch (ed.), *Mining the archives: Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the occasion of his 60th birthday, 4 October 2002* (Dresden 2002) 229–235; A.K. Guinan, 'A severed head laughed: stories of divinatory interpretation' in: L. Ciraolo & J. Seidel (eds), *Magic and divination in the ancient world* (Leiden 2002) 7–40; Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, on divination in general see 44–97.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING DIVINATION

Many definitions of divination can be found in the literature. Depending on whether these privilege the conceptions of ancient practitioners or those of modern observers, they can be classified as either predominantly emically or as more etically oriented. As has been noted, in emic definitions the supernatural tends to take an important place as the source of the divinatory sign. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq and Georges Contenau, for example, define divination as finding knowledge about divine thinking by means of signs.[1] Some would say that divination can be defined as the human extraction of a sign from the supernatural in order to find answers to questions and acquire knowledge of the unknown.[2] Both types of definition suppose the supernatural plays an active role in the divinatory process. Another variation is the use of the word 'communication' (between man and supernatural) without the etic addition that this would have been *perceived* communication. Such a definition is essentially emic.

Other definitions use both etic and emic wording, inviting confusion. One example is Hartmut Zinser's definition in the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*: he states that the purpose of divination is to find out what is as yet—and by human means—unknown.[3] Zinser incorporates function in his definition and does not explicitly mention the supernatural, suggesting an etic outlook. Nevertheless his definition is still partly emic in nature because knowledge gained by means of divination is *perceived* knowledge: it is impossible to find out the unknown by divinatory means.

There are etic definitions, too. The *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* defines divination as the human observation of perceived divine signs and the response to these.[4] The *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* also emphasizes human observation and subsequent interpretation, allowing

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[1] Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1, 7; Contenau, *La divination*, 9.

[2] G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen 1933) 355–360; M. Loewe & C. Blacker, 'Introduction' in: idem (eds), *Divination and oracles* (London 1981) 1–2, at 1; J.N. Bremmer, 'Divination VI. Greek' in: *NewP*. Visited 23-01-2010.

[3] H. Zinser, 'Mantik' in: *HrwG*, vol. 4, 109–113, at 109.

[4] W. Burkert, 'Divination: Mantik in Griechenland' in: *ThesCRA*, vol. 3, 1–51, at 1.

the individual an active role.[5] In these definitions the human actor is assigned a central role: the individual not only interprets the sign but also creates it by recognizing it.

For the present purpose, what is needed is a cross culturally applicable, concise, etic definition that takes account of this twofold human role in producing and interpreting the sign. I therefore propose the following etic definition: divination is the human action of production—by means of evocation or observation and recognition—and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural. These signs can be anything which the supernatural is perceived to place in the world with the intention to communicate, whether evoked or unprovoked, whether visible, auditory, tactile, olfactory or gustatory: in all cases the individual must recognize a sign as coming from the supernatural in order to consider it as a divinatory sign.[6] Once this has occurred, the signs need to be interpreted—whether this task is straightforward or difficult. This (culturally specific) interpretation produces a clear message.[7] On the basis of this definition, the following three constituent elements can be identified in the process of divination: first, the *homo divinans*—a term used here to designate any person divining, whether layman or professional—; second, the sign he observes, recognizes and interprets; and third, the oral or written textual framework which the *homo divinans* might use while divining. These are the subjects of the chapters in Part II. This definition allows room for variation in the functions of divination: to receive perceived information from the supernatural, to right what has gone wrong in the past, to know why the present is the way it is or to provide a—more or less detailed—guideline for the future.

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[5] Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 45–46.

[6] As appears from this definition, I do not make a distinction between 'prophecy', 'omen divination' and so on—made by, e.g., M. Nissinen, 'Prophecy and omen divination: two sides of the same coin' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 341–351. According to my definition, the sayings of a prophet such as those of Ištar, or the pronouncements of the Pythia at the Delphic Oracle, are simply auditory signs.

[7] For emphasis on how interpretation is culturally specific cf. A. Hollmann, *The master of signs: signs and the interpretation of signs in Herodotus' Histories* (Cambridge, MA 2011) 32–54. Some have considered divination, especially Greek divination, to be an ambiguous practice. However, in practice, everything was done to make the outcomes of divination as clear as possible. The sources highlighting ambiguity are literary sources, such as Herodotos and Homer, and it can be argued that they did this for very specific rhetorical reasons: K. Beerden & F.G. Naerebout, ' "Gods cannot tell lies": riddling and ancient Greek divination' in: J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain & M. Szymanski (eds), *The muse at play: riddles and wordplay in Greek and Latin poetry* (Berlin 2012) 121–147.

The divinatory process could be prognostic or diagnostic. It was prognostic when the sign was used to reveal unknowns still in the future. It could be diagnostic, too: a client could visit an expert after some misfortune had befallen him. The expert could ask whether or not the client had seen a particular sign. If so, this sign could be used to explain the particular current misfortune and ensure a better future. During this process, the expert reasoned back in time, pinpointing the sign by deducing it from its consequences. In short, the function of divination is to diminish uncertainty and although divination is future oriented, it is also concerned with past and present.

The Divinatory Process and Its Function

The first element in the divinatory process is a sign: "[. . .] anything, whether object, sound, action, or event, which is capable of standing for something in some respect."[8] A divinatory sign had to be recognized. It could be something which an individual observed and recognized as being significant: a sign could therefore be a special occurrence, a disruption in the patterns of normality. However, a sign could also be something perfectly normal which only became significant at the moment at which an individual observed it and recognized it as a sign.[9] It could be argued that the spontaneous occurrence of dark fungus in a house was a special occurrence—if it was taken to be a divinatory sign.[10] It was then significant in the mind of the individual who recognized it for what it, in his opinion, was. The supernatural could also be asked to give a sign by the performance of a ritual of evocation. Even in this case, the resulting sign would still needed to be recognized—although it will have been more obvious what was being looked for when the shape of the requested sign had been specified.

A sign should not have been influenced by humans: the sign had to be 'objective'. Fritz Graf mentions the 'randomising element' in divination.[11] A prime example is the use of dice for divinatory purposes. However,

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[8] Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 3.

[9] As W. Burkert puts it: "chance events could be turned into signs by 'accepting' them" (W. Burkert, *Creation of the sacred: tracks of biology in early religions* (Cambridge, MA 1996) 159). It should be noted that 'chance events' is a too restrictive term: the events in question might also be 'non-chance'.

[10] *Šumma ālu* tablet 12.43 as published by Freedman in: *If a city is set on a height*, vol. 1.

[11] Graf, 'Rolling the dice', 61. This idea is also visible in S.I. Johnston, 'Charming children: the use of the child in ancient divination', *Areth* 34 (2001) 97–117, at 109—see also

despite (or perhaps even because) randomization, signs could always be—or be suspected of having been—tweaked or influenced.[12]

Signs could occur in many shapes and forms. A frequently used categorization is—what Ernst Magnus calls—ecstatic versus technical.[13] This distinction between ecstatic ('intuitive') and technical ('scientific') divination, referring to differences in the ways signs might manifest themselves and in the methods used to interpret them, goes back to Antiquity. In his *De divinatione*, perhaps drawing inspiration from Plato's distinction between 'manic' and 'sane' divination, Cicero distinguishes between *divinatio naturalis* (including prophecies or oracles provided in a state of frenzy and in dreams) and *divinatio artificiosa*.[14] Two other frequently used categorizations are based on how and where the sign occurred: evoked versus unprovoked divination and terrestrial versus heavenly signs. The latter distinction, derived from the Mesopotamian compendia, is regularly used in Assyriological studies.[15]

Here, signs are categorized into two categories: visual and auditory.[16] These signs could be evoked or unprovoked. Methods of divination normally in the visual category are teratomancy, morphoscopy, hieroscopy, astronomy, empyromancy, dendromancy, aleuromancy, cleromancy, hydromancy, lithomancy/psephomancy, keraunoscopy, nephomancy, anemoscopy, rhabdomancy, tyromancy, axinomancy, koskinomancy, sphondylomancy, ooscopy, reading textual signs, libanomancy, and idolomancy.[17] Divination by means of auditory signs refers to the interpretation of signs

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the references she provides. For more references on this topic see H.S. Versnel, *Transition and reversal in myth and ritual* (Leiden 1993) 174 n. 158.

[12] But if the validity of divination was called into doubt, it was usually not the sign which was doubted, but its interpretation: cf. p. 26.

[13] E.S. Magnus, *Die Divination, ihr Wesen und ihre Struktur, besonders in den sogenannten primitiven Gesellschaften: eine einführende Abhandlung auf vergleichender religionsphänomenologischer Basis unter Berücksichtigung von parapsychologischen Ergebnissen und soziologischen Aspekten* (Hannover 1975) 225–243. A discussion about various classifications of the sign may be found in Magnus. Note that in the category of prophecy, there are elements which can be called ecstatic, but also interpretive, artificial or 'rational', as Mazzoldi and Bonnechere rightly state: S. Mazzoldi, 'Cassandra's prophecy between ecstacy and rational mediation', *Kernos* 15 (2002) 145–154; P. Bonnechere, 'Mantique, transe et phénomènes psychiques à Lébadée: entre rationnel et irrationnel en Grèce et dans la pensée moderne', *Kernos* 15 (2002) 179–186.

[14] Pl. *Phdr.* 244a–d; Cic. *Div.* 1.6.11–12.

[15] E.g., Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 54–88.

[16] Tactile, olfactory and gustatory signs (each very small categories) are left out of this account.

[17] Greek and Roman references to various kinds of visual divination are many and may be found in Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination, passim*. Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', *passim* provides references for the Near East.

either in the shape of the spoken word (recognized as such when spoken in a language known to the *homo divinans*), meta-linguistic sounds, and any other sounds.[18] In practice, there can also be an overlap between the two categories: for example, during brontoscopy if thunder *and* lightning are observed or during zoomancy if both behaviour *and* sounds of the animal are taken into account. Dreams and visions can consist of visual or auditory signs, or both: the categories are not mutually exclusive.[19]

The *homo divinans* or *homines divinantes*, whether layman, expert or both of these (more than one person could be involved) recognized and interpreted the sign—with the help of an oral or written text, by means of discussion or simply on the basis of personal experience. If a lay *homo divinans* was content with his own explanation of a sign, no expert needed to be involved in the process. If he was unsure, he would consult an expert who had, in his opinion, special knowledge:

> Just at this time, as Alexander was sacrificing, wearing garlands, and just about to initiate the first victim according to the ceremonial, a carnivorous bird hovering over the altar dropped on his head a stone which it was carrying in its talons. Alexander asked Aristander the seer what this omen of the bird meant, and he answered: "O King, you will capture the city; but for today you must look to yourself."[20]

The layman could also begin by consulting an expert when special knowledge of the divinatory process was needed.[21] This expert would make a query for the client and interpret the sign. Of course, an expert could also recognize an unprovoked sign on his own account, choosing to share this knowledge with the person for whom the sign was, in his opinion, intended.[22] The prerequisite for any *homo divinans*, layman or expert, was 'omen-mindedness'. This term expresses the idea that human beings are constantly on the lookout for occurrences to provide them with meaning.

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[18] E.g., SAA 9 4; Aesch. *Ag*. 1080–1195; Cic. *Div*. 1.18.34.

[19] E.g., ^{d}Zaqīqu; Hdt. 1.108 (more visual); 3.124 (more auditory); Hom. *Od*. 19.560–565; Cic. *Div*. 1.20.39–1.30.65. Note that epiphanies are not necessarily considered to be divinatory—it depends on whether or not a sign (in any shape or form) was provided in the epiphany.

[20] Arr. *Anab*. 2.26.4. Translation by P.A. Brunt. Edition: Teubner. Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ θύοντι Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ ἐστεφανωμένῳ τε καὶ κατάρχεσθαι μέλλοντι τοῦ πρώτου ἱερείου κατὰ νόμον τῶν τις σαρκοφάγων ὀρνίθων ὑπερπετόμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βωμοῦ λίθον ἐμβάλλει ἐς τὴν κεφαλήν, ὄντινα τοῖν ποδοῖν ἔφερε. Καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος ἤρετο Ἀρίστανδρον τὸν μάντιν, ὅ τι νοοῖ ὁ οἰωνός. Ὁ δὲ ἀποκρίνεται ὅτι· ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὴν μὲν πόλιν αἱρήσεις, αὐτῷ δέ σοι φυλακτέα ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῇδε τῇ ἡμέρᾳ.

[21] See for an example of the idea that an expert was needed to answer difficult questions: Aeschin. *In Tim*. 75–76.

[22] Cf. pp. 125–127.

In other words, it expresses the idea that humans seek to detect agency in the environment—any occurrence is thought to have been brought about by someone or something. These agents are usually people or animals. If an event for which no person or animal could be held responsible took place in the ancient world, humans still required an agent to explain the event: on account of the omnipresent belief in the existence of a supernatural, people could easily attribute otherwise unexplained occurrences to a 'hidden agent' of this type. In the field of cognitive religion this is called the 'Agency Detection Device'.[23] Naturally, some sort of selection of what was a sign and what was not, would need to have been made in what has been dubbed: "[…] the economy of signification".[24]

When evoking a sign or interpreting it, or in both stages, the *homo divinans* could use a text in the widest sense of the word. Chapter 6 revolves around texts as used within the divinatory process, which are categorized into interpretative guidelines, ritual manuals and questions and answers. These texts could function performatively ('I evoke a sign'), informatively ('This particular sign happened at a particular time') or prescriptively ('This particular sign should be interpreted as follows').

These three main etic elements in the divinatory process are depicted in relationship to one another (Figure 1). It should be noted that the relative importance of each element could be greater or smaller in any given cultural area: variations in importance between the three elements illuminate what is specific to Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman divination.

An etic model, based on an etic definition, provides a deeper understanding of divinatory practice than does its emic counterpart when looking from a scholarly point of view.[25] The model shown in Figure 2 depicts objects as squares and actions as ovals.

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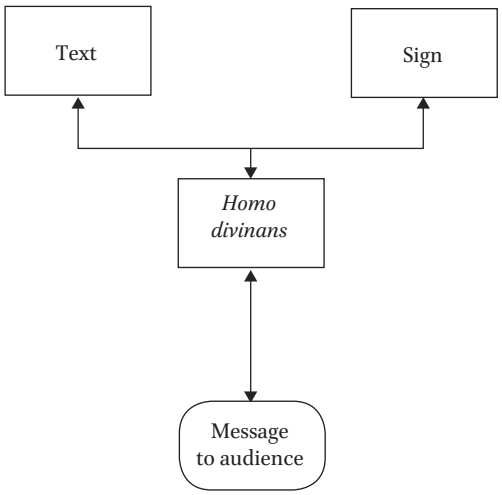
[23] Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', 43–59; J.P. Sørensen, 'Cognitive underpinnings of divinatory practices' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (eds), *Unveiling the hidden: contemporary approaches to the study of divination* (forthcoming); A. Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination in Roman Republican times: a cognitive approach* (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen 2007). See further, more generally on cognitive theory the following recent volumes: T. Tremlin, *Minds and gods: the cognitive foundations of religion* (Oxford 2006), especially 75–200; P. Boyer, *Religion explained: the human instincts that fashion gods, spirits and ancestors* (London 2001); I. Pyysiäinen & V. Anttonen (eds), *Current approaches in the cognitive science of religion* (London 2002); M. Graves, *Mind, brain and the elusive soul: human systems of cognitive science and* religion (Aldershot 2008); J.P. Sørensen, *A cognitive theory of magic* (Lanham, MD 2007).

[24] Smith, *Imagining religion*, 56. Cf. p. 127.

[25] For a more emic model see D. Briquel, 'Divination VII. Rome' in: *NewP*. Visited 23-01-2010.



Partly inspired by D. Zeitlyn: 'Finding meaning in the text: the process of interpretation in text-based divination', *JRAI* 7 (2001) 225–240, at 227.

Figure 1: Divinatory elements

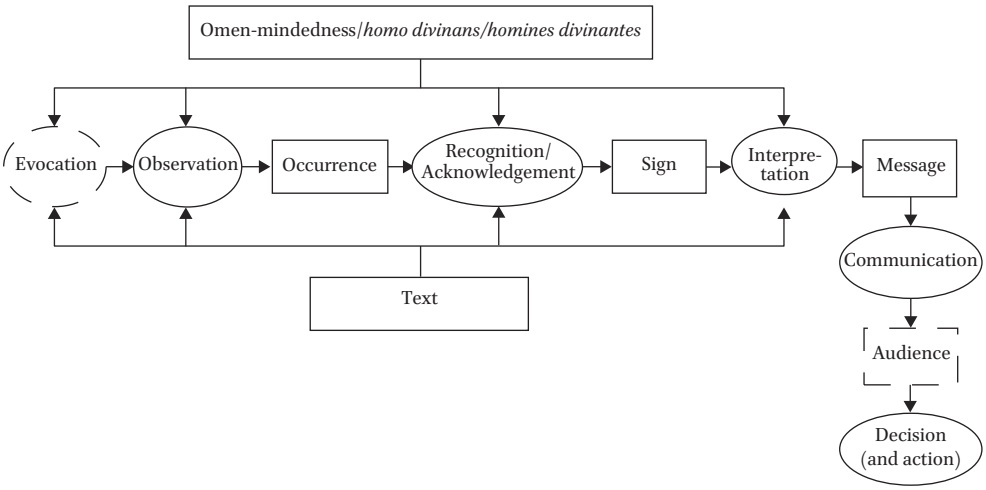


Figure 2: Etic model

In Figure 2, the divinatory actions become visible: evocation, observation, recognition/acknowledgement and interpretation. It works as follows: first the individual observes and recognizes a sign (unless diagnostic divination is taking place). In the case of evoked divination, he has specifically asked for the sign and in his act of recognition acknowledges the sign

to be the one he asked for; in the case of non-evoked divination he needs to designate a spontaneous occurrence as a sign. Then the *homo divinans* interprets the sign in question, after which it acquires an understandable meaning. The sign has become a message. Lastly the meaning provides the audience (either the *homo divinans* himself or his clients) with knowledge about an issue about which it might have been concerned (although this concern does not need to have been articulated). This knowledge can stimulate the individual to act or decide, although this is not invariably so. It should be noted that in an emic practice perceived misinterpretation of a sign is always possible—but that this is not possible in an etic model.

An important aspect that is implicitly depicted in the etic model is the function of divination. The outcome of the divinatory process, in the shape of a message, provided the *homo divinans* with information which led to some perceived degree of certainty about links between past occurrences and present conditions, or even about events in the (near) future—for both public and private purposes.

Foundations of the Process

The provision of divinatory signs by the supernatural should be seen in a larger context: that of perceived reciprocal relationships between mankind and its supernatural.[26] Ancient reciprocity "[…] is to be found as an ethical value, as a factor in interpersonal relations, as an element of political cohesion, as economically significant, as a way of structuring human relations with a deity, as shaping the pattern of epic and historical narrative, as a central theme of drama."[27] Reciprocity lay at the heart of social, economic and political life.[28] Reciprocal exchange creates a relationship between the parties: the transaction was therefore usually not instantaneous and the items exchanged were not required to have the same economical value.[29] They could, however, be of an economic nature.

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[26] On these relationships in tragedy see R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and ritual: Homer and tragedy in the developing city-state* (Oxford 1994); and more generally: R. Parker, 'Pleasing thighs: reciprocity in Greek religion' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 105–125; for 'the gift' in mythology see, among others, J.F. Nagy, 'The deceptive gift in Greek mythology', *Areth* 14 (1981) 191–203.

[27] R. Seaford, 'Introduction to reciprocity' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 1–11, at 1.

[28] H. van Wees, 'The law of gratitude: reciprocity in anthropological theory' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 13–49, at 15.

[29] The value of the gifts—in both directions and both positive or negative—is primarily based on the value of the social meaning of the action of giving itself (R. Brown, *Social*

Participation in perceived reciprocal relationships between man and supernatural can be said to have been obligatory in the ancient world—for both parties.[30] Perceived relationships between humans and the supernatural were asymmetrical: ultimately humans were completely dependent on the supernatural as a source of benefits, protection and guidance, as well as providing for their afterlives (if applicable). They needed to compensate—although they never fully could!—the supernatural for the good it gave (or to improve on current gifts).[31] This asymmetrical relationship was the least severable reciprocal tie there was: ancient man could not quit this relationship—there was no life without the supernatural.[32] Without this human-divine relationship society was not perceived to be able to function and, more specifically related to this discussion, individuals would have been without divinatory signs to assist them.

The place of Greek knowledge of divination in the system of reciprocal relationships between human and divine is subject of discussion. Some argue that knowledge of divination was originally perceived to be a gift from the supernatural, for which something had to be given in return: in some sources the mythological Teiresias gained knowledge of divination and his sight was taken in exchange.[33] However, there are also other accounts about why Teiresias became blind, not explicitly connecting eyesight and knowledge of divination.[34] Furthermore, it might be argued

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psychology: the second edition (New York 1986); E. Reuben & F. van Winden, 'Social ties and coordination on negative reciprocity: the role of affect', *JPE* 92 (2008) 34–53.

[30] If one individual gives to another on the understanding that this person will return the gift in some way, the ultimate purpose of reciprocity is putting another individual under a new or renewed obligation, either positive or negative, thereby creating a new (balance in a) relationship: either a future benefit will be provided, the relationship has become 'even' again or a new relationship is shaped. Reciprocity is 'en réalité obligatoirement faits et rendus' (M. Mauss, 'Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques' in: idem, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris 1950) 145–279, at 147 (first published in *AS* n.s. 1 (1923–1924) 30–186)). It has been argued many times that early Greece was a society in which a very 'competitive generosity ruled'. See H. van Wees, 'Greed, generosity and gift exchange in early Greece and the western Pacific' in: W. Jongman & M. Kleijwegt (eds), *After the past: essays in ancient history in honour of H.W. Pleket* (Leiden 2002) 341–378, at 342 n. 2. On biological explanations for gift-giving more generally see W. Burkert, 'Offerings in perspective: surrender, distribution, exchange' in: T. Linders & G. Nordquist (eds), *Gifts to the gods: proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1985* (Uppsala 1987) 43–50, at 44.

[31] H.S. Versnel, 'Self-sacrifice, compensation and the anonymous gods' in: *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Genève 1980) 135–194, at 177.

[32] E.g., Parker, 'Pleasing thighs', 122–124. The sources he used for this argument also deal with *philia* between man and supernatural, e.g.,: Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1238b26–39; *Eth. Nic.* 1158b33–1159a12.

[33] Flower, *The seer*, 37.

[34] The idea that eyesight and inner sight were really exchanged for one another is visible in Ov. *Met.* 316–350 (a late source but this idea can also be seen in (Ps.-)Hesiod 275

that, since Prometheus was perceived to have stolen knowledge of divination, at least from Classical times onward this knowledge was perceived as something that belonged to humans (and did not need to be exchanged for something else).[35]

The individual signs do certainly have their place in the human-divine reciprocal relationship. Especially in Greece, the idea that individual signs were usually perceived to be a gift from the supernatural was often made explicit, but this perception was less pronounced in Rome and Mesopotamia.[36] Nevertheless, during Mesopotamian evoked extispicy, the god Šamaš (and at times Adad) were called upon to provide man with signs (after having received a sacrificial gift).[37] Implicitly, these can be considered gifts from the supernatural—and gifts were given to the supernatural in return. In Rome and Mesopotamia (as in Greece), it can be seen that humans attempted either to give back to the supernatural or provided gifts (usually by means of sacrifice) in order to build up some 'credit' in their reciprocal relationship with the supernatural. A spontaneous sign was among the things to be expected among future benefits.

Contextualization as a Ritual

Magic, Science or Religion?

In the existing literature, divination has been assigned to the realms of science, magic, or religion.[38] The fly in the ointment is that the definitions

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as noted in Apollod. 3.6.7). However, in many other of the sources about Teiresias it is not explicitly stated that the two served as compensation for one another (see the other accounts provided in Apollod. 3.6.7).

[35] Aesch. *PV* 484–499.

[36] A great many examples could be provided here. See among many others: App. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.540–554.

[37] Cf. pp. 111–113.

[38] On relationships between these three, taking special account of B. Malinowski's and J. Goody's ideas, see K.E. Rosengren, 'Malinowski's magic: the riddle of the empty cell', *CurrAnthr* 17 (1976) 667–685. For a concise overview of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions about defining religion and magic see especially G. Cunningham, *Religion and magic: approaches and theories* (Edinburgh 1999). A number of key publications discussing religion, magic and science are also H.G. Kippenberg, *Magie: die sozialwissenschaftliche Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main 1978); J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs & P.V. McCracken Flesher (eds), *Religion, science, and magic: in concert and in conflict* (Oxford 1989) and S.J. Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge 1990).

of these categories are often vague and that both emic and etic definitions are regularly used indiscriminately.

Divination has, by some, been put into the realm of the non-theistic, saying that divinatory signs were perceived not to have come from the supernatural.[39] In so far as this is so, the individuals who reasoned like this were philosophers and other members of the elite while the majority of individuals did consider divinatory signs to come from the supernatural.[40] Furthermore, according to my etic definition, divinatory signs are by definition coming from the supernatural—otherwise they would not be divinatory.

Some Assyriologists argue that divination should be seen as a science: owing to the systematic nature of the compendia and their casuistic structure they consider divination as "a way to rationally find out what will happen in the future". The compendia would provide guidelines in order to find out about a perceived cause-effect relationship.[41] However, although divination can be seen as a rational phenomenon looking at causes and effects, backed up by a theoretical background of sorts, this does not necessarily mean it is a science—at least not in our etic sense of the word: the laws behind the divinatory cause-effect relationship were

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[39] W. van Binsbergen & F. Wiggerman, 'Magic in history: a theoretical perspective, and its application to Mesopotamia' in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn (eds), *Mesopotamian magic, textual, historical and interpretative perspectives* (Groningen 1999) 3–34, at 25–27.

[40] An author such as Artemidoros, for example, was also considering other options than the supernatural when it came to origins of the divinatory sign. The majority of ancient individuals, however, did not share his considerations. See for recent introductions to Artemidoros in context: L. Hermes, *Traum und Traumdeutung in der Antike* (Zürich 1996); J. Bilbija & J.-J. Flinterman, 'De markt voor mantiek: droomverklaring en andere divinatorische praktijken in de Oneirocritica van Artemidoros', *Lampas* 39 (2006) 246–266.

[41] For extensive arguments about divination as a science science see especially the work of F. Rochberg, much of which has conveniently been gathered in: F. Rochberg, *In the path of the moon: Babylonian celestial divination and its legacy* (Leiden 2010). See also F. Rochberg, 'Observing and describing the world through divination and astronomy' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 618–636; M.T. Larsen, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind: reflections on science, divination, and literacy' in: F. Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, literature, and history: philological and historical studies presented to Erica Reiner* (New Haven 1987) 203–225. Another approach used to explore the science angle is the use of 'historical omens' (see for some examples of this kind of omen the two published by I. Starr, 'Historical omens concerning Assurbanipal's war against Elam', *AfO* 32 (1985) 60–67). However, see the different opinions in: Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 13–19; F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Empiricism in Babylonian omen texts and the classification of Mesopotamian divination as science', *JAOS* 119 (1999) 559–569; M. Neujahr, *Predicting the past in the ancient Near East: mantic historiography in ancient Mesopotamia, Judah, and the Mediterranean World* (Providence 2012) 89–92.

not clear and they could not be tested or verified, but this verifiability is one of the central features of what modern individuals call science.[42] Although divination was undoubtedly concerned with systematically finding knowledge, it is not a science from an etic perspective.[43]

Divination is seen here as essentially a theistic phenomenon: the signs are thought to have emanated from the supernatural. But should divination be considered as magic or as religion? What are magic and religion anyway? Those using emic definitions argue that religion and magic are plants in the same garden: some practices are socially acceptable and others unacceptable, depending on dynamic social opinions.[44] Although this is a valid argument, the emic discussion about whether or not the ancients 'had' magic or religion, in the sense of the social (un)acceptability of phenomena or in the sense that they defined these concepts themselves, is not of interest here. Etic definitions and distinctions are necessary: "magic does not exist, nor does religion. What do exist are our definitions of these concepts."[45] Distinctions between magic and religion are regularly drawn on the basis of the idea that religion implies a human subjection to the supernatural because man understands he is powerless, whereas magic entails techniques by which man thought he could force the supernatural into action. Following up on this idea, I consider magic and religion to be part of one spectrum of human interaction with the supernatural. This can be visualized as a sliding scale. On the one pole we find 'acting religiously'—asking the supernatural—and on the other end we find 'performing magic'—forcing the supernatural to do or say something. On the basis of these considerations, I shall use 'interaction with the supernatural' (which could also be called 'religion' in the widest sense of the word) as the overarching category, with magic and religion (in a narrow sense) as the two poles on this sliding scale. It follows that divination

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42 "[Babylonian divination] shares some of the defining traits of modern science: it is objective and value-free, it operates according to known rules, and its data are considered universally valid and can be looked up in written tabulations." However, "there is no evidence that the Mesopotamian scholars ever attempted to verify the results of their speculations by experiment" (for this quote and more discussion: Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 13–19).

43 On divination as a system for finding knowledge: E. Robson, 'Empirical scholarship in the Neo-Assyrian court' in: G.J. Selz (ed.), *The empirical dimension of ancient Near Eastern studies/Die empirische Dimension altorientalischer Forschungen* (Vienna 2011) 603–629, at 625.

44 Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 122.

45 H.S. Versnel, 'Some reflections on the relationship magic–religion', *Numen* 38 (1991) 177–197, at 177.

was always some form of perceived interaction with the supernatural—but it depends on what actually happened during the divinatory process whether this could be labelled magical or religious interaction.

Necromancy, a divinatory method during which a ghost or some other supernatural being was evoked, shows how one particular method of divination could occupy various positions on the sliding scale. In the following scene in Aeschylos' *Persians*, the ghost of King Dareios is evoked:

> Chorus: Shah, ancient Shah, come, draw near
> arrive at the very top of your funeral mound
> raising the yellow-dyed slippers on your feet, [...]
> In the circumstances how can the Persian people do best?
> Dareios: Only if you take no expedition into Greek territory,
> not even if the Persian army is larger.[46]

A question is asked and Darius answers, providing bystanders with a guideline for the future. This example of mantic action is clearly religious interaction with the supernatural—as is every purely mantic action: the supernatural is never forced to do anything as it is *requested* to reveal information.

However, it seems that divinatory interrogation could also be just a preliminary step after which the ghost could be *ordered* to perform actions (or to give information!) for the benefit of the human individual.[47] In these cases, a mantic element preceded magical interaction and commanding the supernatural became part of divinatory action. Even if allowance is made for the fact that it is not always possible to find out what the main purpose of a ritual was, it can still be argued that whenever a ghost was ordered to, e.g., harm an enemy during the mantic session, divination contained a magical element and the ritual as a whole begins to move along the sliding scale. Conversely, mantic elements can also be seen during actions with a primarily magical goal. For example, when (in Plutarch's

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[46] See Aesch. *Cho*. 459–460 for another example. Aesch. *Pers.* 658–661; 788–791. Translation E. Hall, *Aeschylus: Persians* (Westminster 1997) 76–77; 84–85. Βαλήν, ἀρχαῖος βαλήν, ἴθι, ἰκοῦ, | ἔλθ' ἐπ' ἄκρον κόρυμβον ὄ- | χθου κροκόβαπτον ποδὸς εὖ- | μαριν ἀείρων [...] | Πῶς ἂν ἐκ τούτων ἔτι | πράσσοιμεν ὡς ἄριστα Περσικὸς λεώς; | Εἰ μὴ στρατεύοισθ' ἐς τὸν Ἑλλήνων τόπον, | μηδ' εἰ στράτευμα πλεῖον ἦι τὸ Μηδικόν.

[47] Illustrating the wide variety of categories of necromantic action by example is: C. Faraone, 'Necromancy goes underground: the disguise of skull- and corpse-divination in the Paris Magical Papyri (*PGM* IV 1928–2144)' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 255–282, especially at 264–265. On necromancy more generally: D. Ogden, *Necromancy in the Greek and Roman world* (Princeton 2001); I.L. Finkel, 'Necromancy in ancient Mesopotamia', *AfO* 29–30 (1983–1984) 1–17.

Kimon 6.6) Pausanias, the Spartan commander, wishes to contact a female ghost in the hope of appeasing her, she also foretells his future. This mantic (and religious) element in a primarily magical process, directed towards making the ghost do something, causes it to move along the sliding scale from the purely magical in the direction of religious interaction.

What does this imply for the position of divination in society? Some have argued that interaction with the supernatural was 'embedded' in ancient society. The term was first used by Sir Charles Lyell who described the way a fossil was positioned in its environment as 'imbedded'.[48] These days, 'embedded' is often applied to the way reporters work when they are in a war zone: they are 'embedded' in the military. The underlying idea is that both the fossil and the journalist are part of their environment, but that they are also restricted by it. So the scholars who argue that interaction with the supernatural was embedded in ancient society are not only implying that religion was important but also that it was restricted as well as shaped by its environment (the society in which it occurred). From an emic point of view, interaction with the supernatural is all-pervasive rather than embedded. Yet, from an etic point of view, I espouse the view that the specific features and modes of religion, including divination, are in constant interaction with other aspects of a specific cultural area. This also offers a partial explanation of religious dynamism: when features of religion and society change, this has a concomitant impact on other features.

Building Blocks of Ritual

A deeper contextualization of divination takes place on the level of ritual. Divination was a phenomenon which could entail ritual: the clearest example of a ritual element in divination is the evocation of a sign, a ritual which was closely connected to prayer and sacrifice.

Prayer could be associated with divination if it was used by an individual to ask the supernatural for a sign. A prayer can be defined as 'asking for good things'[49] (or for keeping away bad things)—a sign can be such a 'good thing'. In the case of evoked divination, prayer was often a preliminary to the divinatory process. However, a prayer could also be a formal part of the divinatory ritual, as was the *ikribu*—the prayer *cum*

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[48] Sir C. Lyell, *Principles of geology, being an attempt to explain the former changes of the earth's surface, by reference to causes now in operation* vol. 1 (London 1830) 85.

[49] S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek religion* (Oxford 1997) 8.

ritual—used by the expert during Mesopotamian extispicy. Unlike a divinatory prayer of evocation, the *ikribu* explicitly guided the expert through the ritual needed to provoke a sign: it asked not only for good things, it was also the expert's 'script', integrating words and action.[50] Therefore, prayer could be a part of evoked divination in more than one way: although mostly a preliminary element, it could also be formalized and become an integral part of the evocation.

Although sacrifice could always precede or follow divination (either to thank the supernatural in the case of a good sign or to appease it in case of a bad sign), there are some very specific instances in which sacrifice was a necessity in the divinatory process. An obvious example is the sacrifice of the animal whose entrails were to be read for divinatory purposes.[51] Also—vice-versa—extispicy was usually a part of sacrifice. Despite these two building-blocks often being inseparable, in practice once again an etic separation can be made: sacrifice can be—very concisely—summarized as 'giving to the supernatural'. Sacrifice is like prayer, an action *towards* the supernatural. The sacrifice served to give something to the supernatural before asking it to do something in return or in this case, to provide a sign. Instead of sacrifice being a mere preliminary, there was yet another way in which divination and sacrifice could overlap (and the two ways do not exclude one another): 'sacrificial divination'. The item or object sacrificed, or part of it, could *become* the sign, which is what happened during the process of extispicy. Another—possible—example in which this intertwinement took place is libanomancy. During libanomancy in Greece and in Mesopotamia, incense—a sacrificial substance—could be used to sacrifice and produce a sign in the shape of smoke.[52] Although it is unclear exactly how the ritual was conducted, there is a possibility

[50] Cf. p. 157.

[51] On extispicy in relation to sacrifice in Mesopotamia see E. Leichty, 'Ritual, "sacrifice", and divination in Mesopotamia' in: J. Quaegebeur (ed.), *Ritual and sacrifice in the ancient Near East: proceedings of the international conference organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of April 1991* (Leuven 1993) 237–242. On sacrifice in Mesopotamia: T. Abusch, 'Sacrifice in Mesopotamia' in: A.I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Sacrifice in religious experience* (Leiden 2002) 39–48. On Greece and Rome see the recent D. Collins, 'Mapping the entrails: the practice of Greek hepatoscopy', *AJP* 129 (2008) 319–345.

[52] On libanomancy in Greece see Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1, 181 or the brief mention in R. Parker, *On Greek religion* (Ithaka, NY 2011) 136. On libanomancy in Mesopotamia (note: sources are from the Old Babylonian period only and published in a variety of short articles) see the two more analytical articles by E. Ebeling, 'Weissagung aus Weirauch im alten Babylonien', *SPAW* 29 (1935) 869–880; G. Pettinato, 'Libanomanzia presso i babilonesi', *RSO* 41 (1966) 303–327.

(although the sources do not state this) that the incense was sacrifice and divinatory sign in one. In short, prayer and sacrifice were intertwined with divination. Divination was a religious phenomenon which did not exist independently of other phenomena—nevertheless, the mantic element in a ritual, with a divinatory or with some other aim, is always sufficiently clear to be able to distinguish it.

Contextualization in the Social Order

Justice, games and medicine are phenomena that have been linked with divination, both in an etic and an emic sense. It is worth exploring these links in the different societies in order to provide some context to the phenomenon of divination.

Justice

Links between justice and divination were present in a number of different ways, especially in Mesopotamia. To start with Greece: divination could play a role in a trial. Oracles were used during sessions in the law courts because of their normative force and in this way played a role in public trials, although in themselves they were neither a rule nor a law.[53] Oracles could also be used with respect to cultic matters, as examples from the Greek *leges sacrae* show.[54] In Rome, negative auspices could rule out particular actions and expiatory guidelines such as the Sibylline Books could prescribe particular actions.

However, only in Mesopotamia were justice and divination convincingly connected in multiple ways. First, there was the idea that the supernatural had motivated or urged the human law-giver to provide justice by means of law, as in the case of Hammurabi.[55]

The second example is the river ordeal, a form of divination which simultaneously provided a judgement in particular cases.[56] The accused

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[53] See G. Martin, *Divine talk: religious argumentation in Demosthenes* (Oxford 2009) 28; 208–209; 219; 223–224. This way of proceeding with respect to oracles appears not to have been restricted to Demosthenes.

[54] J.D. Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 48. With respect to Greek sacred laws: E. Lupu, *Greek sacred law: a collection of new documents* (Leiden 2005) 77–78.

[55] Codex Hammurabi, introduction.

[56] S.M. Maul, 'Divination culture and the handling of the future' in: G. Leick (ed.), *The Babylonian world* (London 2007) 361–372, at 362. The ordeal only took place in particular

would be sentenced to the river ordeal, "[…] an ordeal by immersion in the 'Divine River' who could pronounce the accused guilty by drowning him, or innocent by letting him survive."[57] It appears that either Marduk was associated with the river or that the river was considered a divinity itself. The pronouncement of guilt or innocence by means of drowning or surviving can be seen as a sign from the supernatural, which again shows a connection between divination and judgement.[58]

In Mesopotamia, divination and justice were also linked conceptually. Divine signs, especially those occurring as a result of the extispicy process, were considered to be a 'divine verdict': the signs were thought to have had a similar function to the judgements handed down in the human law courts, namely: deciding what was wrong and right and establishing a scenario of what would happen to the individual in his or her future.[59] Consider a Mesopotamian text known from Old Babylonian times: the so-called 'prayer to the gods of the night'. Law, justice and jurisdiction play a role in this divinatory prayer which was recited during the divinatory ritual: the expert asks for justice to be provided through extispicy. *Recht*, justice, *kittu*, was a term normally used in jurisdiction. However, the same word was used to denote what the supernatural did when it was perceived to give a sign during extispicy.[60] Other vocabulary also overlaps (*arkata parāsu* 'investigate the circumstances', *dina dânu* 'give a verdict', *purussâ parāsu* 'make a decision').[61] According to some sources, in this

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cases: if a person was accused of sorcery or witchcraft, this was not judged by human judges in a normal law court. Also, if there was not enough evidence to make a case and the judge could not decide, he sought a different authority. See for examples R. Jas, *Neo-Assyrian judicial procedures* (Helsinki 1996) texts 47 and 48.

[57] W. Farber, 'Witchcraft, magic and divination in ancient Mesopotamia' in: J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East* vol. 3 (New York 1995) 1896–1910, at 1898.

[58] See the introduction by R. Westbrook in: *A history of ancient Near Eastern law* vol. 1 (Leiden 2003) 1–90, at 34 (also see his references); K. Radner, 'Neo-Assyrian period' in: ibidem, vol. 2, 883–910, at 891. It is known from Old Babylonian times that poisonous herbs were taken to swear an oath: if the one taking the poison died, he was lying (S. Démare-Lafont, 'Judicial decision-making: judges and arbitrators' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 335–357, at 351).

[59] J.C. Fincke, 'Omina, die göttlichen "Gesetze" der Divination', *JEOL* 40 (2006–2007) 131–147.

[60] On the use of *kittu*: C. Wilcke, 'Das Recht: Grundlage des sozialen und politischen Diskurses' in: J. Hazenbos, A. Zgoll & C. Wilcke (eds), *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden 2007) 209–244, especially 225–227.

[61] U.S. Koch, 'Sheep and sky: systems of divinatory interpretation' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 447–469, at 466. See for an in-depth analysis of *dīnum* J.J. Glassner, 'Droit et divination: deux manières de rendre la justice. À propos de *dīnum, uṣurtum* et *awatum*', *JCS* 64 (2012) 39–56.

respect the extispicy ritual could be even be seen as a law court in which the supernatural sat together, judged and then provided mankind with the judgment by means of a sign.[62] In other words, "[law and religion—this includes divination—serve] to establish and preserve tranquillity in a community of some size".[63] In a best case scenario, both divination and law provided justice.

A final point of overlap concerns the striking formal similarities between the written texts used for divination and law codes: it has even been argued among Near Eastern scholars that, as a genre, law codes such as the Codex Hammurabi were related to divinatory compendia.[64] In these law codes, the *protasis* and *apodosis* construction (if . . . then) corresponded to these constructions in the compendia in terms of wording. An example from the Codex Hammurabi:

> If a slave of the palace or the slave of a working man marries a man's daughter and she bears sons, the slave's owner shall have no right of slavery over any son of the daughter of the man.[65]

And an example from *Manzāzu*, part of the *Barūtu*, Tablet 3:

> If the Presence is like a knob of a punting pole: the prince will have no opponent.[66]

Both the compendia and the codex describe a situation and state the consequence, expressed syntactically in similar ways. The verdict in the codex or a prediction in the compendia both appeared as casuistic sentences.[67] While at times Greek and Roman laws were also phrased casuistically (as some of the laws in the Twelve Tables and the Laws of Gortyn), we know very little of Greek and Roman interpretative guidelines.[68] Perhaps Melampos' writings could be considered here. Yet, in the matter of

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[62] Wilcke, 'Das Recht', 224–243; Fincke, 'Die göttlichen "Gesetze" ', 131–147.

[63] G. Schiemann, 'Law [2] IV A' in: *NewP*. Visited 07-02-2011.

[64] The Codex Hammurabi is referred to here because no collection of laws is known to us from the Neo-Assyrian period. See K. Radner, 'Neo-Assyrian period', 883–910.

[65] Translation by M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's laws: text, translation and glossary* (Sheffield 2000) 97. Edition by H.-D. Viel, *The complete code of Hammurabi* vol. 2 (München 2005) 600–601. 175: *Šum-ma* ^{lu}ÁRAD-É.GAL *u* ^{lu}ÁRAD-MAŠ.EN.GAG DUMU.MÍ *a-wi-lim i-ḫu-uz-ma* DUMU.MEŠ *it-ta-la-ad be-el* ÁRAD *a-na* DUMU.MEŠ MUMU.MÍ *a-wi-lim a-na wa-ar-du-tim ú-ul i-ra-ag-gu-um.*

[66] '37 (A 113'). Edition and translation: Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens*, 95. The text refers to the shape of the liver. [BE] NA GIM *ṣer-ret pa-ri-si* NUN GABA.RI NU TUK-*ši.*

[67] Cf. Guinan, 'A severed head laughed', 22.

[68] Cf. pp. 144–157.

conceptual as well as textual overlap between law and divination, only Mesopotamia presents a convincing case.

Games

A number of scholars refer to a link between divination and games, both conceptually and practically.[69] On a conceptual level, games can be primarily defined as a free activity, belonging to the area of the 'as if', in which they create their own space and time in which an inner order is established.[70] The second and third criteria certainly seem to be applicable to divination. In addition to this, some would even claim that games based on chance derive from divinatory practice.[71]

The more practical similarities between games and divination are particularly striking in two methods of divination: geomancy and cleromancy. These methods of divination and gaming were both (in an etic sense) partially based on chance, bound by rules, and the same objects could be used for both. The first step is to look at the use of objects: in geomancy, divination was performed by means of patterns drawn on the floor or earth. In board games, a comparable defined space was used—the gaming board.[72] Cleromancy could be conducted by using, among other items, dice and *astragaloi*—in the same way these would function in games or gambling.[73] *Astragaloi* used both in divination and games

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[69] Recently most prominently by W. van Binsbergen, although this article should be regarded critically: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/gen3/mankala/mankala1.htm. Visited 02-10-2009. For an up-to-date, accessible overview of ancient games see M. Fittà, *Spiele und Spielzeug in der Antike: Unterhaltung und Vergnügen im Altertum* (Stuttgart 1998), with games of chance at 108–129.

[70] Simplified from the definition by G.G. Bauer, 'Play and research: a contradiction?' in: A.J. de Voogt (ed.), *New approaches to board games research: Asian origins and future perspectives* (Leiden 1995) 5–8, at 6–7 which is in turn based on J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens: proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur* (Haarlem 1938).

[71] On the supposed origins of games see H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board-games other than chess* (Oxford 1952) 226–238, divination and games on 233–235.

[72] Note that this is not geomancy in the sense of modern Feng Shui. See W.M.J van Binsbergen, 'Rethinking Africa's contribution to global cultural history: lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mancala board-games and geomantic divination', *Talanta* 28/29 (1996–1997) 219–251, at 225–231.

[73] In games: Hdt. 1.94.2–4. In divination: Artem. 2.69; 3.1; Aeschin. *In Tim*. 1.59; M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca* vol. 4 (Rome 1978) 107–108. For an example of Mesopotamian rules of a game in which *astragaloi* were used and a possible connection between games and divination see I.L. Finkel, 'On the rules for the royal game of Ur' in: idem (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 16–32. Another example of a 'gaming board', which the author claims to be at least partly cleromantic, is E. Weidner, 'Ein Losbuch in

were small, four-sided, knucklebones from the ankle of hoofed animals.[74] These—and later also dice and related objects—would be thrown and the throw was interpreted in a divinatory fashion, possibly with the aid of texts such as the ones known from later cleromantic oracle sites in Asia Minor, while the outcome of the gaming throw was interpreted according to the rules of the game in question.[75] Another connection here is the use of chance: the randomizing element was prevalent in cleromancy because of the use of dice, in the same way as when games were played and dice were thrown.[76]

Lastly, Mesopotamian gaming boards and the liver are thought to have resembled each other in some ways: both had a grid of twenty squares and a similarity can be seen in their shape.[77]

Keilschrift aus der Seleukidenzeit', *Syria* 33 (1956) 175–183 and other views in J. Bottéro, 'Deux curiosités assyriologiques', *Syria* 33 (1956) 17–35.

[74] For a very short introduction to cleromancy, especially astragalomancy see J. Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal- und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (München 2007) 6–17. The Greek astragalos generally signifies the knucklebones from the hooves of an ox. It should be noted that the dice oracles discussed in this publication are mainly from the first centuries AD.

[75] Note that a so-called dice existed in Mesopotamia, where they were used to decide who would become the eponym. This dice is depicted and briefly discussed in A. Millard, *The eponyms of the Assyrian empire 910–612 BC* (Helsinki 1992), frontispiece and 8–9, and more extensively in: I.L. Finkel & J. Reade, 'Lots of eponyms', *Iraq* 57 (1995) 167–172. This last publication reveals unequivocally that the dice was actually a lot, but we cannot tell for sure how it was drawn. In any case, its purpose was to decide who would be eponym, but this kind of lot was also cast when someone died, to divide the inheritance among the family.

[76] Dice were, among items, used in board games in the Roman world. See N. Purcell, 'Inscribed Imperial Roman gaming boards' in: I.L. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 90–97; examples from later times in: C. Roueché, 'Late Roman and Byzantine game boards at Aphrodisias' in: ibidem, 101–105.

[77] I.L. Finkel, 'Board games and fortune telling: a case from antiquity' in: A.J. de Voogt (ed.), *New approaches to board games research: Asian origins and future perspectives* (Leiden 1995) 64–72, at 71. But see also about a possible connection between the twenty squares and the grids of liver models and gaming boards: J.W. Meyer, 'Lebermodell oder Spielbrett' in: R. Hachmann (ed.), *Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen in Kāmid el-Lōz in den Jahren 1971 bis 1974* (Bonn 1982) 53–79. Apart from this theoretical similarity, three other objects combining a liver model and a gaming board have been found: see A. Becker, 'The royal game of Ur' in: I.L. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 11–15, at 12–15. Another line of enquiry was followed by both E. Weidner and J. Bottéro who have theorized about the nature of a number of cuneiform tablets which appeared to link astragalomancy, games and divination by the zodiac. See Weidner, 'Ein Losbuch', 175–183 and Bottéro, 'Deux curiosités', 17–35. For a more anthropological angle on the connections between games and divination using the distinction between constitutive and regulative

Certainly divination and games were bound by a set of pre-defined rules, which could be flexible. When it was a matter of a divinatory session, the rules could have been written down but this did not necessarily mean they were unalterable: rules could be negotiated before the commencement of a divinatory session. The same applies to games: anthropological evidence shows that, for instance, in a session of *mancala*, an ancient African game, the rules are established locally. When two individuals from different towns meet, they settle the rules there and then. Change can occur in the process of establishing these rules.[78] New rules are learned and used.

Finally, the matter of context has to be settled: when does a person play a game and when does he divine? Where did divination begin and throwing the dice for gaming purposes end?

> Upon entering we found that the boys had just been sacrificing; and this part of the festival was nearly at an end. They were all in their white array, and games at dice were going on among them. Most of them were in the outer court amusing themselves; but some were in a corner of the apodyterium playing at odd and even with a number of dice, which they took out of little wicker baskets; and there were others standing about them and looking on.[79]

While the distinctions between games and divination might seem blurred to us, for the person throwing the dice or using a game-board it was usually obvious whether he was divining or gaming: this depended on both the rules agreed on and on the context in which the game was played. These rules were normally decided and defined in advance and were partly dependent on the context. They were decided upon explicitly by means of the spoken word or by the use of a special board for ritual or for gaming purposes, or otherwise were agreed upon implicitly.[80]

Divination and games resembled each other in a number of ways but distinctions can be made. During divination the purpose was to obtain

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rules (which I have not used here) see E.M. Ahern, 'Rules in oracles and games', *Man* n.s. 17 (1982) 302–312.

[78] A.J. de Voogt, *Mancala: board games* (London 1997) 22–27.

[79] Pl. *Lys.* 206e2–9. Translation W.R.M. Lamb. Εἰσελθόντες δὲ κατελάβομεν αὐτόθι τεθυκότας τε τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰ ἱερεῖα σχεδόν τι ἤδη πεποιημένα, ἀστραγαλίζοντάς τε δὴ καὶ κεκοσμημένους ἅπαντας. Οἱ μὲν οὖν πολλοὶ ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἔπαιζον ἔξω, οἱ δέ τινες τοῦ ἀποδυτηρίου ἐν γωνίᾳ ἡρτίαζον ἀστραγάλοις παμπόλλοις, ἐκ φορμίσκων τινῶν προαιρούμενοι· τούτους δὲ περιέστασαν ἄλλοι θεωροῦντες.

[80] In the way recreational and ritual boards can be used during mancala: De Voogt, *Mancala*, 28–32.

perceived information from the supernatural—this was not the purpose of gaming; during gaming a competitive element, which was absent during divination was present. To the individual, it was clear in advance whether the play was for fun, material gain or for seeking information from the supernatural. Gaming and certain methods of divining were therefore related in terms of a number of practicalities. Yet, they both served different purposes.

Medicine

In ancient societies, illness was often seen as a sign from the supernatural either as a punishment for religious transgression or, more generally, just being of divine origin.[81] In Greek, the word *nosos* can be etymologically explained as 'not having' (divine favour).[82] In the Graeco-Roman tradition, the inscriptions from the healing shrines of Asclepius attest to an overlap between the practices of medicine and divination. The incubation dreams recorded in these texts can be categorized into prescriptive and healing dreams. In prescriptive dreams, which appear to have been more prominent after the first century BC, the person received instructions by which he would be cured. In the case of a healing dream, the person reported to have actually been cured in his sleep. The same process of incubation could have a medical result and one which could be called divinatory: the individual had received information from the supernatural.[83]

The practices of medicine and divination were intertwined in Mesopotamia too—albeit in a different way.[84] One obvious example is that part of the Mesopotamian compendium *Sakikkû* called *Enūma ana bīt marṣi*

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[81] E.g., Burkert, *Creation of the sacred*, 102–128; A. Chaniotis, 'Illness and cures in the Greek propitiatory inscriptions and dedications of Lydia and Phrygia' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, Ph.J. van der Eijk & P.H. Schrijvers (eds), *Ancient medicine in its socio-cultural context* vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1995) 323–344.

[82] A. Willi, 'νόσος and ὁσίη: etymological and sociocultural observations on the concepts of disease and divine (dis)favour in ancient Greece', *JHS* 128 (2008) 153–171.

[83] K. Beerden, 'Dromen van genezing: een verkenning van Griekse incubatiepraktijken', *Lampas* 45 (2012) 283–296.

[84] Cf. T.S. Barton, *Power and knowledge: astrology, physiognomics, and medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI 1994) 133–168—Barton focuses on the Roman world but many issues she addresses are equally valid for Greece and Mesopotamia. Early Greek divinatory experts would also be healers, for example, and the term *iatromantis* is a familiar one in these early sources. R. Parker explores the field of purifiers, doctors and experts in R. Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (Oxford 1983) 207–216. But see also for a more radical distinction between 'quack doctor' (including 'diviners') and 'a real physician', based on the two attacks on experts in the Hippocratic corpus (*Virg.* 1 & *Acut.* 8): J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate* (Paris 1992) 261–267. For a brief and clarifying overview

āšipu illaku ('when the *āšipu* goes to the house of the sick'), which relates the contextual signs an *āšipu* might observe on his way to visit the house of a patient.[85] These were divinatory signs. In other parts of the same compendium, where the same *āšipu* is at work, the physical symptoms of the patient himself functioned as signs—which were medical signs. Both types of sign were seen as providing the *āšipu* with information which could be used for diagnosis, prognosis and treatment.

A more structural point of overlap—in all three areas—is that both divination and medicine were based on the idea that 'an anticipation of the future' was possible.[86] The doctor would observe and interpret contextual and medical signs during diagnostic activity, after which a diagnosis—establishing what the disease was—and prognosis would follow (diagnosis might be implicit in prognosis and vice-versa—but the one was not possible without the other), resulting in treatment.[87] This is similar to the actions of the *homo divinans*: he also provided a prognosis which influenced a future action.

Despite these similarities, it is possible to make an etic distinction between medicine and divination, which is in my opinion not visible in *Sakikkû*. From an etic point of view, in medical prognosis there was an

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in which the various roles of the *iatromantis* are shown see I. Löffler, *Die Melampodie: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion des Inhalts* (Meisenheim am Glan 1963) 14–17.

[85] The edition of these tablets is found in R. Labat, *Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux* (Paris 1951). Some regard the medical compendia as explicitly non-divinatory. See N.P. Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (Münster 2000) 4–5; but note that there is a link: I follow Koch in arguing there is an overlap in the practice and theory of expert and *āšipu*: U.S. Koch, lecture *'Āšipu and divination?'*, Leiden University, 12 May 2010.

[86] L. Edelstein, 'Hippocratic prognosis' in: O. Temkin & C.L. Temkin (eds), *Ancient medicine: selected papers of Ludwig Edelstein* (Baltimore 1967) 65–85, at 69. The *mantis* and poet were both familiar with past, present and future, and were at times thought to be divinely inspired: see Hes. *Th.* 25–34. Similar questions about the education and practice of doctors might be—and have been—asked: see L.M.V. Totelin, *Hippocratic recipes: oral and written transmission of pharmacological knowledge in fifth- and fourth-century Greece* (Leiden 2009); M.M. Sassi, *The science of man in ancient Greece* (Chicago 2001) 140–148.

[87] See the interesting model in M.A.A. Hulskamp, *Sleep and dreams in ancient medical diagnosis and prognosis* (PhD thesis, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2008) 259. Cf. J. Althoff, 'Das Verhältnis von medizinischer Prognose zur religiösen Divinatorik/Mantik in Griechenland' in: A. Imhausen & T. Pommerening (eds), *Writings of early scholars in the ancient Near East, Egypt, Rome, and Greece: translating ancient scientific texts* (Berlin 2010) 47–68. On diagnostic and therapeutic activity in the Mesopotamian world (much focused on the texts available) see Heeßel, *Diagnostik*, 5–6; N.P. Heeßel, 'Diagnosis, divination and disease: towards an understanding of the rationale behind the Babylonian diagnostic handbook' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff & M. Stol (eds), *Magic and rationality in ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman medicine* (Leiden 2004) 97–116.

actual cause and effect relation between illness and outcome. There was no such cause and effect relationship between divinatory signs and the predicted consequences.[88]

Having discussed and analysed the phenomenon of divination from multiple angles it can be said that divination was a central means for perceived interaction with the supernatural on a reciprocal basis and was closely connected to its societal context—ritual and otherwise. These etic foundations of the divinatory process apply to all three of the cultural areas discussed in this monograph.

[88] Cf. M.J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian medicine: theory and practice* (Chichester 2010) 15.

CHAPTER THREE

COMPARISON

The analysis undertaken in this study is comparative: to discover what is specific to divination in a particular cultural area, it has to be compared to that in another area. An examination of Greek divinatory practices by using systematic comparison has hardly been endeavoured yet, although a number of scholars have insisted on the need for a comparative approach and initial moves have been made.[1] In 1965, for instance, when Hans Klees produced a comparative study in which one particular source (Herodotus) was used to understand what the author considered to be non-Greek, 'strange', divinatory practices. The author's goal was to improve understanding of Greek practices.[2] However, I feel that this particular approach is too restrictive because its scope is limited by the source materials and their inevitably emic angle. Geoffrey Lloyd has reflected on questions about a comparison between Chinese and Greek divination and has used divination in his wider investigations.[3] Recently, Sarah Iles Johnston has edited

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[1] Outlines have been provided: J.P. Sørensen, 'On divination. An exercise in comparative method' in: T. Ahlbäck (ed.), *Approaching religion: based on papers read at the symposium on methodology in the study of religions held at Åbo, Finland, on the 4th–7th August 1997* vol. 1 (Åbo 1999) 181–188; J.P. Sørensen, 'A comparative approach to divination ancient and modern' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (eds), *Unveiling the hidden: contemporary approaches to the study of divination* (forthcoming), Flower, *The seer*, *passim* uses materials from the ancient Near East to elucidate Greek sources (though unsystematically). G.E.R. Lloyd has worked on the subject in a number of his many publications, comparing Greece to China (see this chapter, n. 3). Currently, comparison between Neo-Assyrian prophecy and biblical prophecy is an important topic. Calls for comparison: M.J. de Jong, '"Fear not, o king!" The Assyrian prophecies as a case for a comparative approach', *JEOL* 38 (2003–2004) 113–121; H.M. Barstad, 'Comparare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and ancient Near Eastern prophecy in a comparative perspective' in: M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context* (Atlanta 2000) 3–12. De Jong has taken on the challenge himself in his *Isaiah among the ancient Near Eastern prophets: a comparative study of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition and the Neo-Assyrian prophecies* (Leiden 2007); and recently J. Stökl, *Prophecy in the ancient Near East: a philological and sociological comparison* (Leiden 2012); and on *ex eventu* prophecies M. Neujahr, *Predicting the past*, have added to the discussion.

[2] H. Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher: ein Vergleich zwischen griechischer und nichtgriechischer Mantik bei Herodot* (Stuttgart 1965).

[3] G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Divination: traditions and controversies, Chinese and Greek divination', *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 21 (1999) 155–165. See also by Lloyd *The revolutions of wisdom: studies in the claims and practice of ancient Greek science* (Berkeley, CA 1987) 38–48; *The ambitions of curiosity*, 21–43. J.J. Glassner, 'Questions mésopotamiennes sur la

a systematic overview of ancient religions, which includes a chapter on the divinatory practices of different Mediterranean civilizations.[4] Although the individual entries are valuable, they do not offer a real comparison or synthesis because of the encyclopaedic nature of the work. There is also no dearth of other poly-cultural studies about divination, but because of their all-encompassing nature, these volumes are not suitable for explicit comparison or cross-cultural analysis. One example is *Divination and oracles* in which divinatory practices in Tibet, China, Rome and Greece, and finally Germany are discussed, each in different chapters by a different author with his own point to make.[5] *La divination: études*, a publication edited by André Caquot and Marcel Leibovici—which has become a standard work of reference on divination in various societies, ancient and modern—, has the same structure, as has the recent volume *Magic and divination in the ancient world*.[6] In the most recent collections of papers on divination this is also the standard approach.[7] Although unquestionably this diversity does raise the reader's awareness of the variety of divinatory practices encountered among various peoples, it is not without serious disadvantages. Each author approaches the topic adopting his own research method, methodology and perspective: the resulting kaleidoscopic picture does not really add to an understanding of the underlying issues. In short, it is time a systematical comparison should be attempted.

Units of Comparison

In my own comparative inquiries Neo-Assyrian, Roman and Greek practices are the three units of comparison. What is specific to and what is general about the various divinatory practices? The underlying assumption is that

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divination', *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 21 (1999) 147–154. Forthcoming is: L. Raphals, *Divination and prediction in early China and ancient Greece* (Cambridge 2013). There seems to be a trend to compare Greece (and Rome) to China in general: S. Shankman & S.W. Durrant (eds), *Early China/Ancient Greece: thinking through comparisons* (Albany, NY 2002); W. Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: comparative perspectives on ancient world empires* (Oxford 2009). A very good review article dealing with ancient historians comparing Greece with China is J. Tanner, 'Ancient Greece, early China: Sino-Hellenic studies and comparative approaches to the classical word: a review article', *JHS* 129 (2009) 89–109.

[4] Aune, 'Divination and prophecy', 370–391.

[5] Loewe & Blacker, *Divination and oracles*.

[6] Caquot & Leibovici, *La divination*; Ciraolo & Seidel, *Magic and divination*.

[7] J.M. Durand & A. Jacquet (eds), *Magie et divination dans les cultures de l'orient: actes du colloque organisé par l'Institut du Proche-Orient ancien du Collège de France, la Société Asiatique et le CNRS (UMR 7192) les 19 mai et 20 juin 2008, Paris* (Paris 2010); Annus, *Divination*; Georgoudi, Koch Piettre & Schmidt, *La raison des signes*.

divination, although a nearly universal human phenomenon, manifests itself in many different ways and has varied through time and space. These variations are postulated to be related to social and cultural differences. Hence, the study of divination is not only of importance to understanding the phenomenon itself, but it is also a vantage point from which to observe a number of essential features of daily life in the societies discussed.

In my comparison of Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia, Greece and Republican Rome, I do not assume these remained static units throughout time. Indeed, I think of them as dynamic. I also assume that the three units of comparison are culturally distinct areas. Nevertheless, there are enough common denominators to consider the three as units suitable to be used for comparative purposes.

Certainly, the comparison could have involved ancient or modern societies other than these three—the units of a comparison do not need to overlap in time or space for the results to be meaningful—but these three provide enough variety to produce results and they fall into my field of expertise. As far as the Mesopotamian material is concerned, I restrict myself to the Neo-Assyrian period, which can be dated from 880–612 BC, the year of the fall of Nineveh. In this period the great Assyrian kings ruled, in whose reigns most of our divinatory records originated: Sennacherib (688–681), Esarhaddon (680–669) and Assurbanipal (668–ca 610). These kings ordered many extispicies to be taken and received letters from both Assyrian and Babylonian scholars. Although there are differences between the ways these scholars operated, as a whole these regions will be referred to as 'Mesopotamia'. The sources are drawn from throughout a large area. Many sources have been found in archives such as those in Nineveh, but reports and letters were sent to the king over great distances. Given the relative homogeneity of the materials, the vast majority of which is concerned with public divination, it does not seem necessary to impose geographical restrictions or distinctions here. In addition to the Neo-Assyrian sources, texts from earlier periods will occasionally be used to illustrate certain points.

The Greek materials stem from Archaic (roughly 800–478 BC), Classical (478–323 BC), and the Hellenistic world before 146 BC. Materials from the period 146 BC and thereafter will only be used to illuminate the earlier sources. The area considered consists of the entire Greek-speaking world.

Roman divination is represented by the Republican period. The sources either date from around 509 BC to ca 31 BC, or they are from a later period, but refer to divination in the Republic. It should be noted that most sources are from the first century BC. In my examination of the Roman materials, the scope of my inquiry will be limited to divination

in the Italian peninsula itself—divinatory practices outside the peninsula are not taken into account here.

The number of sources from these three cultural areas which deal with divination in some way or the other is enormous. To provide just a glimpse of what kind of sources are available, I would like to draw attention to the fact that valuable information can be found in both tragedy and in the Dodonaic tablets for Greece; in Mesopotamia the evidence includes compendia as well as queries and letters; the Roman historian Livy and many other authors, for example Nigidius Figulus who translated a brontoscopic calendar from Etruscan into Latin, were interested in divination and its outcomes. The centrality of divination in daily life is reflected in the variety of the divinatory sources. With respect to the later Graeco-Roman sources, here used occasionally to illuminate earlier sources, it is often difficult to argue whether they are 'Roman' or 'Greek'. I have categorized such additional sources which discuss practices in Greece and the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire as 'about Greece' and those discussing Rome as 'about Rome', in so far as this was possible. The place of origin of the author or the language in which he wrote have not been the prime concern. Another issue regarding the sources is that they restrict our view of private divination—especially for Rome and for Mesopotamia, there is a bias in the sources towards public divination (in which experts were usually involved). For Greece, in addition to those on public divination, we have more sources on private divination, which will prove valuable for the purpose of this study.

In an attempt to provide some guidance to this wealth of material, the sources may be categorized. Importantly, Greek and Roman epigraphical sources will be taken into account, bridging part of the gap which has often been thought to exist between Graeco-Roman literary materials and Near Eastern cuneiform tablets. I have made a subcategorization of the sources under another three headings: texts used in the process of divination, second-hand records of the process and explicit reflection (Why did it happen? Why do we do this?). The texts used in the process of divination detail, for example, how a sign could be provoked and how it could be interpreted. The Mesopotamian compendia are the best examples of texts serving the latter purpose. The second-hand records are reports of divination which can be found in the literary sources. Texts in the category of explicit reflections are one step farther removed from the process: these texts relate explicit thinking and opinions about divination. The divisions between the categories are not always clear-cut—does the literary 'Sin of Sargon' text report on divination or does it reflect on its practice? This results in Table 1:

Table 1. Sources

	Example Rome	Example Greece	Example Mesopotamia
Visual			
Ritual texts	Nigidius Figulus' brontoscopic calendar	Melampos, *Peri elaion tou somatos*	Compendia (e.g., *Šumma ālu*)
Records	Livy (35.21.3)	Xenophon (*An.* 6.4.22)	Letters to the king from astrologers
Explicit reflections	Cicero, *De divinatione*	Plato (*Phaedo* 244c)	Sin of Sargon
Auditory			
Ritual texts	Nigidius Figulus' brontoscopic calendar	Dodonaic lamellae (if these signs were indeed auditory)	Compendia (e.g., *Šumma ālu*)
Records	Livy (35.21.4)	Stelae on which pronouncements of oracles were provided	Letters to the king from Arbela
Explicit reflections	Cicero, *De divinatione*	Plutarch, *De Pythiae Oraculis*; Plato (*Respublica* 427bc)	SAA 10 174

Up to a point, Table 1 undermines the widely held view that the Near Eastern sources provide practical outlines on how to perform divination and that the Graeco-Roman materials are more reflexive. The sources from all three societies are rich in their own ways: the evidence from Dodona reveals how divination worked in practice, and the Mesopotamian letters and reports to the king also provide information which is other than practical. It should be noted that, on account of the practical 'man(/king)-in-the-street' perspective I am taking, the more philosophical sources will be used sparingly to illustrate general issues.

The Comparative Method Discussed

The aims of a historical comparison can be roughly threefold: evolutionary, typological and heuristic.[8] The first task of the researcher is to

[8] Note that there is no such thing as *the* comparative method: see G. Śaraṇa, *The methodology of anthropological comparisons: an analysis of comparative methods in social and cultural anthropology* (Tucson 1975) vii–viii, 15. Other issues with the term are explained briefly in W.E. Paden, 'Comparative religion' in: L. Jones (ed), *The encyclopedia of religion: second edition* vol. 3 (Detroit 2005) 1877–1881. For discussions of method and its issues:

explore the possibility whether one phenomenon or development could be derived from the other, implying a historical connection which could lend itself to evolutionary comparison.[9] The trend in current research is to argue that many aspects of Greek divination are likely to derive from Mesopotamian divination. This discussion has been greatly advanced by Walter Burkert, Martin West and many other scholars. Theirs, and their critics', main conclusion is that many aspects in Greek culture and religion have come from the Near East, but that pinpointing these is another matter. There is no need here to add to this discussion, interesting and important as it may be.[10]

The second possible purpose of the comparative method is to weigh up two, or more, units of comparison to attempt to reconstruct an unknown third or a 'type'.[11] This typological comparison is "[…] the study of the variety of life forms of human societies and the construction of a theoretical model for the study of universal human social phenomena".[12] As Galton's Law explains: "it is essential that the degree in which the customs compared are independent should be known, for they might be derived from a common source and be duplicate copies of the same original […]."[13] Consequently, in any attempt to make a typological comparison, it is necessary to take examples from societies which are as independent of each

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R.A. Segal, 'In defense of the comparative method', *Numen* 48 (2001) 339–373; M. Pye, *Comparative religion: an introduction through source materials* (New York 1972); A. Sica, *Comparative methods in the social sciences* vols 4 (London 2006); E. McKeown, 'Inside out and in between: comparing the comparativists', *MTSR* 20 (2008) 259–269.

[9] The historical comparison can serve to "[…] attempt to prove an historical connection between two cultures and to reconstruct the social and cultural history of a certain society, people, or area" (M. Malul, *The comparative method in ancient Near Eastern and biblical legal studies* (Kevelaer 1990) 15).

[10] Their main focus is on the Archaic period. See W. Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Heidelberg 1984); more recently W. Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: eastern contexts of Greek culture* (Cambridge, MA 2004); M.L. West, *The east face of Helicon: west Asiatic elements in Greek poetry and myth* (Oxford 1997); and also R. Lane Fox, *Travelling heroes: Greeks and their myths in the epic age of Homer* (London 2008). Samples of micro-studies are, e.g., P. Högemann & N. Oettinger, 'Die Seuche im Heerlager der Achäer vor Troia. Orakel und magische Rituale im hethiterzeitlichen Kleinasien und im archaischen Griechenland', *Klio* 90 (2008) 7–26; J. Scurlock, '"Chaldean" astrology: Sextus Empiricus illustrated by selected cuneiform sources', *Ktèma* 29 (2004) 259–265; J. Jacobs, 'Traces of the omen series Šumma izbu in Cicero, De divinatione' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 317–339.

[11] Cf. on possibilities of the comparative method: A.P. David, *The dance of the muses: choral theory and ancient Greek poetics* (Oxford 2006) 4–7.

[12] Malul, *The comparative method*, 15.

[13] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method in social anthropology* (London 1963) 9.

other as possible, so as to minimize the risk of the intrusion of intercultural influence. This is an important issue: Rome, Greece and Mesopotamia were too close to one another and too much in contact with each other for this kind of comparison. Some influence (but most probably more rather than less) is bound to have occurred at some point. It is also impossible to rule out the possibility that in some respects the three societies are all 'descendants' of an unknown other culture.[14] If my aim had been to make a typological comparison, it would have been necessary to compare Greek divination to, for example, Chinese divination—as Lloyd has indeed already done.[15]

The aim of the comparative method can also be heuristic. An event or phenomenon from one culture can be used to illuminate aspects of a comparable phenomenon in a different culture. Any set of units of comparison can be chosen for this purpose. As Clifford Geertz comments on his purpose in comparing Islam in Morocco and Indonesia: "at once very alike and very different they form a kind of commentary on one another's character."[16] In his approach, the comparative method is used to highlight these 'characters'.[17] The aim is to use the two points of comparison in order to "[…] go beyond the constraints of the immediate context in order to construct a more generally useful frame of understanding."[18] This involves the idea that comparison serves to make particular aspects of phenomena more pronounced, as similarities and differences shed light on each other.[19] The result is a "[…] recontextualisation [which] facilitates entirely new ways to understand a given subject".[20] This is exactly the purpose of the comparative exercises in the following chapters: to obtain

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[14] Cf. R. Naroll, 'Galton's problem: the logic of cross-cultural analysis' in: A. Sica (ed.), *Comparative methods in the social sciences* vol. 2 (London 2006) 3–21 (first published in *Social Research* 32 (1965) 428–451).

[15] Cf. this chapter, n. 3.

[16] C. Geertz, *Islam observed: religious development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven 1968) 4.

[17] Cf. D.M. Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared: a methodological survey of comparisons of religion from "a magic dwells" to "a magic still dwells" ', *MTSR* 16 (2004) 80–101, at 91–94, and the publication his argument is about: Smith, *Imagining religion*, 19–35, and some of the scholarly reception of this last article in: K.C. Patton & B.C. Ray (eds), *A magic still dwells: comparative religion in the postmodern age* (Berkeley, CA 2002).

[18] Pye, *Comparative religion*, 22. Of course, there are many more ways to compare: A.A. van den Braembussche, 'Historical explanation and comparative method: towards a theory of the history of society', *H&T* 28 (1989) 1–24. See on thinking about the aims of using the comparative method Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method*, 21–24.

[19] Geertz, *Islam observed*, 55.

[20] Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared', 99.

an understanding of the variety in the phenomenon of divination as practiced in the units of comparison—with a specific focus on Greece.

The advantages of using the comparative method in this way are many: the results of explicit comparisons force the investigator to rethink structures and ideas usually taken for granted. Comparison aids in conceptualizing the variety to be found in a specific phenomenon, in this case divination. The comparison is used to reveal a number of varieties and similarities within one phenomenon: a comparison is rather like a lens, focusing on a number of issues which are then viewed from a different perspective than would normally be the case.[21] The next step is to attempt to explain and interpret the similarities as well as differences and then provide a cultural explanation.

During the course of this study it should be taken into account that "[…] comparison does not necessarily tell us how things 'are' […]. A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge."[22] New questions related to meaning, function and development of a phenomenon in a cultural area automatically arise because there is a new set of emic material to be investigated and interpreted. A comparison might demonstrate that there are essential features in divination that every cultural area has in common—the similarities—but also that divination displays endless variability. More importantly, a comparison helps to generate ideas about the how, what and why of the phenomenon under consideration.

In the past, the comparative method has received some bad press.[23] The history of scholarship shows that the method has often been used to point out similarities between two societies while the differences were overlooked. In order to avoid this one-sided approach, it is necessary to

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[21] Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared', 91.

[22] J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery divine: on the comparison of early Christianities and the religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago 1990) 52.

[23] I should also stress that it is not my intention to prove that a particular religion or culture (in this case the Greek one) is unique. I think all three cultural areas are unique—I merely highlight Greek peculiarities with regard to divination. A very brief discussion of the different aims of different 'schools of comparativism' can be found in I. Strenski, 'The only kind of comparison worth doing: history, epistemology, and the "strong program" of comparative study' in: T.A. Idinopulos, B.C. Wilson & J.C. Hanges (eds), *Comparing religions: possibilities and perils?* (Leiden 2006) 271–292; one of the problems of the comparative method has been that it has served those with a programme of judgementalism ('which religion is better?'), which is avoided here. See also G. Weckman, 'Questions of judgement in comparative religious studies' in: ibidem, 17–25.

focus on both differences and similarities.[24] The similarities might indicate a historical connection or the more universal features of a phenomenon, whereas differences draw attention to aspects which, in many cases, assume a new importance. Both results are equally valuable, but for my purposes the differences are even more illuminating and significant than the similarities.

Another complaint lodged about the comparative method is that it has been used inconsistently and asymmetrically. Inconsistently in the sense that comparative materials are resorted to whenever they seem to come in useful in a study but are otherwise not referred to. The complaint of lack of symmetry has to do with the fact that during comparison only one of the cultural areas studied is discussed on the basis of primary and secondary sources, but conclusions about the other area(s) are reached by means of secondary literature only. I am aware of this pitfall and aim to avoid it, by making a systematic comparison on a symmetrical basis—as much as this is desirable and possible with the available sources. It is essential to note that the results remain deliberately asymmetrical, as I am concerned specifically with Greek divination.

This leads to another point which needs explanation: the source materials. The sources used in this research are taken from different genres, were produced by different cultural systems and originate from different time periods. Do these objections mean that they cannot be compared? I do not think so. Variety in the sources does not invalidate the enquiry as long as we "[…] take into account the character and goal of each type of evidence".[25] Differences do not make materials or ideas incomparable: all materials, ideas or data are *always* intrinsically different from each other. Nevertheless, it is always possible to compare any two sets of data as long as it is not argued that they are identical or a historical connection is claimed. Indeed, comparing less similar or equivalent data makes the comparison more interesting because it opens up more opportunities for research and analysis.[26]

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[24] On the importance of explaining differences as well as similarities see Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method*, 17.

[25] Malul, *The comparative method*, 70.

[26] Cf. on comparison of units M. Detienne, *Comparer l'incomparable* (Paris 2000) 41–59 or Śaraṇa, *Anthropological comparisons*, 18–33 and for a brief overview of the history of the historical comparison P. Borgeaud, 'Réflexions sur la comparaison en histoire des religions antiques', *Métis* n.s. 1–2 (2003–2004) 9–33, at 26–31; on the levels on which comparison is possible J.S. Jensen, 'Universals, general terms and the comparative study of religion', *Numen* 48 (2001) 238–266. He distinguishes between form, function, structure, and 'semantic content'.

One final issue which must be addressed is the necessary decontextualization of the phenomenon being compared in the different societies. In my view, this is the heuristic purpose of the comparative method: decontextualization of a phenomenon from a particular society enables comparison with that phenomenon in another society—the comparison can be performed systematically precisely because the phenomenon has been taken out of its context. In other words, instead of taking each and every aspect of Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divination into account, my comparative enquiries will focus specifically on the *homo divinans*, the sign and the role of text in the divinatory process. Divination will be recontextualized into Greek society in the concluding chapter.

PART TWO

ELEMENTS OF ANCIENT DIVINATION

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *HOMO DIVINANS*: LAYMAN AND EXPERT

The *homo divinans* can be a layman or an expert: I consider the expert to be an individual claiming knowledge about the evocation, observation, recognition and interpretation of the signs of the supernatural.[1] He receives money, goods or less tangible rewards in exchange for sharing this knowledge with his client. The layman usually divines for himself on an ad hoc basis and receives no tangible reward.

On account of the availability of the source materials, the greater part of this chapter consists of a structural comparison of the socio-economic status of certain groups of experts in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. Establishing differences and similarities in the socio-economic status of these divinatory experts contributes to building an understanding of their diversity in the three cultural areas—and eventually of the structures of divinatory practice.

To Divine-It-Yourself or to Consult an Expert?

Unquestionably certain methods of divination or particular occasions did require an expert, but perhaps there were other reasons to consult such a person as well. Many chose to consult an expert although this required time and money. Still, the individual could divine for himself should he choose to do so—whether his divinatory session was about a matter of public or private concern.

Divine-It-Yourself

What examples of divine-it-yourself *do* we know? For Rome and Mesopotamia, not many—in the Greek sources divination by the layman is more

[1] I use the term 'diviner' for both laymen and experts from the three cultural areas: anyone could be a *homo divinans*. I use 'expert' as a neutral term—I avoid 'seer' because this implies a presence of charisma or inspiration which need not be present in each cultural area discussed here.

visible. Nevertheless, divine-it-yourself practices must have occurred more often in these cultural areas than the available evidence suggests.

A divinatory method such as cleromancy was very suitable to divination by laymen because, as far as we know, this did not require complicated rituals, materials (like the animal used during extispicy) or procedures and provided a relatively simple sign. Interpretation could—but not necessarily did—follow simple rules, a lot or dice were easy and cheap to obtain and uncomplicated to draw or throw. In theory all methods could be used without calling in an expert: it all depended on the layman's confidence in his own skills. An expert would be needed only when the individual could not perform a ritual himself, was in doubt about a specific interpretation or uncertain of his own abilities. Whether or not the layman interpreted the sign correctly in the eyes of other laymen or the expert is a different matter.[2]

At least some signs and their meanings were thought to be familiar to large numbers of individuals. The Greek soldiers in Homer's *Iliad* all knew whether the sign produced by the flight of a bird was good or bad:

> Even as he [Ajax] thus spake, there flew forth a bird upon the right hand, an eagle of lofty flight; and thereat the host of the Achaeans shouted aloud, heartened by the omen.[3]

On another occasion, when he was reluctant to accept the command of the army, Xenophon argued that there were signs so obvious that anyone could interpret them: '[…] and the gods gave me such signs in the sacrifices that even a layman could perceive that I must withhold myself from accepting the sole command.'[4]

These, and many other, examples show that most laymen could probably recognize a good or bad sign when they saw or heard of one.[5] Laymen must have possessed a basic knowledge about the assumed meaning of certain signs.[6]

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[2] E.g., Hdt. 3.65. The dream had been misinterpreted—according to Herodotos—, apparently by the dreamer himself who had been certain about what the dream would mean. However, from an etic perspective, misinterpretation does not exist.

[3] Hom. *Il.* 13.821–823. Translation A.T. Murray. Ὣς ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης· ἐπὶ δ' ἴαχε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν | θάρσυνος οἰωνῷ·

[4] Xen. *An.* 6.1.31. Translation C.L. Brownson. Καί μοι οἱ θεοὶ οὕτως ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐσήμηναν ὥστε καὶ ἰδιώτην ἂν γνῶναι ὅτι τῆς μοναρχίας ἀπέχεσθαί με δεῖ. There are more such examples, take for instance the signs when Dareios became the Persian king: Hdt. 3.86. Cf. Xen. *An.* 3.2.9.

[5] Pestilence is another such example of an inherently bad sign in Rome and Greece.

[6] As is visible in a source like Herodotos, where more laymen than experts perform divination (Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 62).

There are strong indications that the laymen among the elite were better informed than the average layman: extispicy is a good example. In Greece, a liver without its 'lobe' or 'head' was a bad sign.[7] Alexander the Great, not an expert himself, knew this particular sign well: "and when the seer told that the victim's liver had no lobe, 'Ah me!' said Alexander, 'A forcible omen!' "[8] Other aspects of extispicy were widely recognized as well—in Euripides' *Elektra*, Aigisthos is depicted as performing a hepatoscopy:

> Aegisthus took the entrails in his hands and inspected them. Now the liver had no lobe, while the portal vein and near-by gall-bladder revealed threatening approaches to the one who was observing it. Aegisthus was angry, but my master asked, "Why are you disheartened?" "Stranger, I fear some treachery from abroad. Agamemnon's son is the man I hate most, and an enemy to my house."[9]

Nowhere is Aigisthos is mentioned as an expert on divination or as having acquired special skills in this field, nor is Euripides.[10] Euripides depiction of Aigisthos' proficiency in extispicy makes it seem like something he just happens to know—and probably so did Euripides. A passage from Xenophon's *Anabasis* suggests the same: the leader of the army, in this case Xenophon, could learn more about divination by means of observation, although he was not an expert himself:

> Now Silanus, the divinatory expert, answered me in respect to the main issue that the omens were favorable (for he knew well enough that I was not unacquainted with divination, from being always present at the sacrifices); but he said that there appeared in the omens a kind of fraud and plot against me, manifestly because he knew that he was himself plotting to traduce me before you.[11]

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[7] This cannot be checked for Mesopotamia because the unspecified Greek term *lobos* cannot be compared to any of the very specific Mesopotamian terms.

[8] Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 73.4.2–5.1. Translation: B. Perrin. Ἠρώτησε τῶν ἱερῶν τὸν τρόπον· φήσαντος δ' ὅτι τὸ ἧπαρ ἦν ἄλοβον, "παπαὶ" εἶπεν, "ἰσχυρὸν τὸ σημεῖον". Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 7.18; Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.7; Plut. *Vit. Cim.* 18.4; Plut. *Vit. Pyrrh.* 30.3; W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war* vol. 3 (Berkeley 1979) 76.

[9] Eur. *El.* 826–833. Translation E.P. Coleridge with slight adaptation. Ἱερὰ δ' ἐς χεῖρας λαβὼν | Αἴγισθος ἤθρει. καὶ λοβὸς μὲν οὐ προσῆν | σπλάγχνοις, πύλαι δὲ καὶ δοχαὶ χολῆς πέλας | κακὰς ἔφαινον τῶι σκοποῦντι προσβολάς. | χὠ μὲν σκυθράζει, δεσπότης δ' ἀνιστορεῖ· | Τί χρῆμ' ἀθυμεῖς; Ὦ ξέν', ὀρρωδῶ τινα | δόλον θυραῖον. ἔστι δ' ἔχθιστος βροτῶν | Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖς πολέμιός τ' ἐμοῖς δόμοις.

[10] At least, not in the *Elektra* (see especially Eur. *El.* 805–839) nor anywhere else either, as far as I am aware. Cf. Odysseus who was not famous for his divinatory skills—but even he knew that it was a good sign when birds flew on the right-hand side: Hom. *Od.* 24.311–312.

[11] Xen. *An.* 5.6.29.1–7. Translation C.L. Brownson. Σιλανὸς δέ μοι ὁ μάντις ἀπεκρίνατο τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, τὰ ἱερὰ καλὰ εἶναι· ᾔδει γὰρ καὶ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἄπειρον ὄντα διὰ τὸ ἀεὶ παρεῖναι τοῖς

Xenophon had been present at the sacrifices many times, probably more than many others in the course of their daily lives, and had had the opportunity to observe the expert at work—a normal practice according to Aeneas Tacticus: "a soothsayer shall not make sacrifice on his own account without the presence of a magistrate."[12] Although Xenophon seems rather overconfident of his own abilities to learn these skills, it does appear that a leader of the army (Aigisthos and Alexander included) could become knowledgeable about the interpretation of signs without being an acknowledged expert. It could then be argued that up to a point the more advanced particularities of divinatory practice were familiar to a better-informed layman elite.[13]

It has to be assumed that there was a great deal of divine-it-yourself going on at all times in Rome and Mesopotamia too, but the evidence is scanty. With regard to Rome, we know that the occurrence of a liver without a head was being recognized as a negative sign.[14] A layman might distinguish a sign for himself (and if necessary, the senate would make the final decision whether or not this would be regarded as *prodigium publicum*). For Mesopotamia, there are clues that show there must have been private, informal divination which could be performed without the help of an expert. The methods used during this 'divine-it-yourself' were perhaps different from those used by the king. Erica Reiner has analysed Sultantepe Text 73, which provides some information about divinatory techniques not—or not commonly—mentioned in the Mesopotamian sources of public divination. These methods are sprinkling an ox with water to observe its reaction, psephomancy,[15] and, more generally, a number of ways to induce 'a sign'.[16] A method such as the interpretation of

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ἱεροῖς· ἔλεξε δὲ ὅτι ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς φαίνοιτό τις δόλος καὶ ἐπιβουλὴ ἐμοί, ὡς ἄρα γιγνώσκων ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐπεβούλευε διαβάλλειν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Ἐξήνεγκε γὰρ τὸν λόγον ὡς ἐγὼ πράττειν ταῦτα διανοοίμην ἤδη οὐ πείσας ὑμᾶς.

[12] Aen. Tact. 10.4.4. Translation: Illinois Greek Club. Edition: Budé. Μηδὲ θύεσθαι μάντιν ἰδίᾳ ἄνευ τοῦ ἄρχοντος.

[13] See also F.T. van Straten, *Hierà kalá: images of animal sacrifice in archaic and classical Greece* (Leiden 1995) 156.

[14] Obseq. 17. In 203 BC one of the consuls found that the head of the liver of his first sacrificial victim was missing (Liv. 30.2.9–13); in 118 the consul Cato sacrificed and the liver of the animal had no 'head' (Obseq. 35); Cic. *Div*. 2.13.32.

[15] Cf. on Mesopotamian psephomancy: I.L. Finkel, 'In black and white: remarks on the Assur psephomancy ritual', *ZA* 85 (1995) 271–276 (and references); A. Schuster-Brandis, *Steine als Schutz- und Heilmittel: Untersuchung zu ihrer Verwendung in der Beschwörungskunst Mesopotamiens im 1. Jt. v. Chr.* (Münster 2008) 56.

[16] E. Reiner, 'Fortune-telling in Mesopotamia', *JNES* 19 (1960) 23–35.

dreams should also be added to this list.[17] Nonetheless, we are left with the impression that knowledge of how to divine was, as far as the sources reveal, more restricted in Mesopotamia and in Rome than it was in Greece. Yet, in Greece too, there were occasions on which lay-knowledge such as that of Xenophon was not quite enough—in such cases, the aid of an expert was still necessary.[18]

Consulting an Expert

Why would a layman, even if he could divine for himself or learn how to do so, still choose to turn to an expert? Ancient sources are not always clear on this matter, necessitating a more theoretical approach on this issue. An expert is presumed to have the skill, expertise and tools to perform a certain kind of divination.[19] On account of these claims, the expert is someone who can "[…] remove the agency and responsibility for a decision from the actor himself".[20] If a layman performs the divination personally and on his own behalf, a perceived conflict of interests might occur: an individual cannot remove agency and responsibility from himself (although the ritual procedure and randomization create some distance)[21] but the expert can take full responsibility for his interpretation on the basis of his authority. Furthermore, an expert is not only a mediator between the perceived supernatural and man, he also serves to mediate between men in social situations in which tensions might be present. The expert can be an outsider in a conflict and hence can resolve such tensions in a seemingly unbiased manner.[22] It could be considered

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[17] Cf. J. Nougayrol, 'Divination et la vie quotidienne' in: P.W. Pestman (ed.), *Acta orientalia neerlandica: proceedings of the [19th] Congress of the Dutch Oriental Society held in Leiden on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, 8th–9th May 1970* (Leiden 1971) 28–36. On prophecy also Stökl, *Prophecy in the ancient Near East*, 117–121. Perhaps such methods as the use of red and white wool or black and white stones, as known from *tamītu* texts, could also be used without the aid of an expert (although in the *tamītu* an expert is in charge of the ritual—W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian oracle questions* (Winona Lake, IND 2007) *passim*).

[18] And as illustrated by Onos. 10.25–28.

[19] On tools used for divination—about which we know next to nothing for Antiquity—see V. Turner, *The drums of affliction: a study of religious processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Ithaca 1981^2) 30–34. Here a expert performs a particular kind of divination and a description of his tools is given; for the Near East see E. Jan Wilson, 'A note on the use of erinnu in bārû-rituals', *JANES* 23 (1995) 95–98.

[20] G.K. Park, 'Divination and its social contexts', *JRAI* 93 (1963) 195–209, at 197.

[21] Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', *passim*. Note that the discussion in this article is about divination with the help of an expert.

[22] As, for example, was observed in the Yoruba community: Park, 'Social contexts', 197.

dangerous to have a member of local society, who might have knowledge of a client's family and affairs, perform the divination.[23] Furthermore, in ancient times, if the expert was itinerant and came from outside the region in which he worked, his knowledge could be perceived as exclusive and prestigious. An itinerant expert was an outsider, which enabled him to be more impartial. Another option in a search for impartiality and exclusivity was for the client to go to an expert or oracle-site far from his home.[24]

Since 'getting it right' was imperative, people were willing to spend time and money on an expert. The wealthier a Greek individual was, the more authoritative the interpretation he could buy by calling on the services of a more prestigious expert. Many economically less affluent members of society would have had to depend on the interpretation of signs by a local or itinerant expert. Those with a little more wealth could afford to travel to an oracle of supra-local importance, while the richer elite could consult or even employ an expert who was famous for his skills. In the Archaic and Classical periods, members of the Greek elite could hire an expert for a longer or shorter period of time if necessary, for example, to join armies during a series of battles. In the Hellenistic period we begin to find possible references to experts being employed not only by individuals but also by *polis* communities, perhaps on particular occasions. For instance, it seems that experts would be present at the Athenian assembly.[25] Although there is little evidence, it seems safe to assume that in Rome and Mesopotamia, as in Greece, those who could afford it consulted an expert for private divination on a more or less ad-hoc basis.[26]

As noted, use of an expert for public purposes can be seen incidentally in Greece, but on a structural level in Mesopotamia and Rome: the Mesopotamian king had his own network of experts and astrologers on hand. Even King Assurbanipal needed experts although he claimed to have more knowledge of divination than many others:

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[23] J. Jansen, *De lessen van Namagan Kanté: zanddivinatie in de Mandé-bergen* (*Mali-Guinée*) (Amsterdam 2007) 46–47.

[24] But also note how civic oracles—close to the *polis*—were also used to make political decisions. Also, an individual might have wanted to go to an oracle which 'specialized' in his kind of topic.

[25] Flower, *The seer*, 122–123. Cf. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 61–63.

[26] The *tamītu* texts show that divination for private purposes with aid of an expert took place: Lambert, *Oracle questions*, e.g., texts 13, 15, 21.

> [Assurbanipal] […] beloved of the god, whom Shamash and Adad gave insight, who learned extispicy, the secret of heaven and earth, the craft of Shamash and Adad […].[27]

The Roman elite also used various bodies of experts for public purposes—*augures, decemviri* and some *haruspices* to advise on and explain public signs—whose members were even appointed from within the elite itself.[28] In Mesopotamia and Rome the advantages of employing experts structurally and in an institutionalized context must have been deemed more advantageous than recourse to a freelance expert, certainly for public purposes.

In Mesopotamia, as in Greece and Rome, the expert was thought to have something the layman did not: authority on the basis of some kind of knowledge. This is why individuals consulted experts. Nevertheless, a perpetual tension existed between confidence in one's own ability to interpret the sign correctly ('I would—or could—have done better!') and the need to have a sense of certainty obtained by using an expert ('Would he have done better?'), whether on an ad hoc or on a structural basis.

Relationship Client-Expert

Despite the fact that experts were regularly consulted, perceptions of their interpretations were not always positive—nor were they unquestioned: disbelief and outright anger were among the possible reactions. Our best examples concern the army. Expert and client were in a symbiotic relationship which was, at times, tense: the Greek army, and the rulers, were dependent on what the expert said—although the final decision rested with the leaders.[29] Such tension is revealed in the *Anabasis* when

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[27] Colophon A iv 46–47. Edition and translation Koch, *Secrets of extispicy*, 137. *na-ram* DINGIR.[MÉŠ *ša*] ^{d}UTU *u* ^{d}IŠKUR GEŠTU.2 DAGAL-*tum id-di-nu-niš-šum* | NAM.[AZU AD.ḪAL AN-*e u* KI-*tim*] *né-me-qí* ^{d}UTU *u* ^{d}IŠKUR. This colophon is known as 'type A': H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (Kevelaer 1968) 97 (number 318) and the even more famous colophon on pages 100–101 (number 325). There are many other types of Assurbanipal colophons, e.g., 'type N': Hunger, *Kolophone*, 97 (number 318). There is a lot of literature on the topic of Assurbanipal's education. See for references the recent S. Zamazalová, 'The education of Neo-Assyrian princes' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 313–330.

[28] On these three groups of experts cf. pp. 68–70.

[29] Arr. *Anab*. 7.18. More examples of such dependence (and the strains on this relationship) are found in a great variety of sources: Hdt. 9.61; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.2; Eur. *Phoen*. 754–759; Soph. *OT* 300–341; 602–610; Onos. 4.5; Onos. 10.25–28; Aesch. *Sept*. 377–380; Hom. *Il*. 1.75–91.

the army was literally unable to move on because the experts said it could not, even though moving was necessary for it to survive.

Could experts be trusted? Had they got it right? Were they wrong in their interpretation or did the experts perhaps have ulterior motives? Might the leader of the army have put pressure on the experts because he had ulterior motives?[30] The expert could, after all, exert a considerable influence on future actions by providing or not providing particular interpretations.[31] In Greece, individuals (high- ánd low-ranking) were dependent on the knowledge of their experts—although, as noted, the final decision still rested with them.[32] However, one would have to have very strong reasons to go against the advice of the expert.

A comparable situation can be seen during the power struggles in the later Roman Republic: politicians needed experts.[33] In the Roman case, the situation was exceptional in the sense that client and expert might have belonged to the same peer group, or even have been the same individual. Another issue was that these experts were working on a more structural basis than in Greece.

The Mesopotamian king also needed to trust his experts because they were employed to ensure his well-being—on a structural basis. They would provide him with advice, which could entail specifics about such topics as military strategy or his health.[34] The experts could restrain the king up to a point: they could tell him it was not right to go outside on a particular day or which people he should and should not meet.[35] In the end, however, it was the king who made the decision, perhaps after a

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[30] Xen. *An*. 6.4.14. For an illustration of the practical problems see Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 18. Cf. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 78–81.

[31] See on demagogic powers of the divinatory expert, e.g., Plut. *Vit. Dion* 22.4–24.3; Xen. *An.* 5.6.16–19. It is clear that "politicians and generals still paid respect to divination" (at least in the fourth century, R. Parker, *Athenian religion: a history* (Oxford 1996) 214).

[32] Pl. *Lach.* 199a; Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 48–49; 139–140; K.J. Dover, 'Some neglected aspects of Agamemnon's dilemma', *JHS* 93 (1973) 58–68, at 64. It should also be noted that, in the Athenian *polis*, oracles were consulted but this was not an essential action: a decision by the Assembly was also valid without a consultation: Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 115.

[33] Just one example is the case in which Caesar and Sulla take stands and the role of the experts in that conflict, as detailed by E. Rawson, 'Caesar, Etruria and the Disciplina Etrusca', *JRS* 68 (1978) 132–152. But see also perceived manipulation by *collegia* in MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 41–42.

[34] SAA 10 111 and SAA 10 112 are striking examples.

[35] As in SAA 10 38; or they could strongly advise the king to stop fasting as in SAA 10 43; or on whether or not he was allowed to see his son as in SAA 10 49; SAA 10 74.

discussion with his magnates.[36] The king-expert relationship can, again, be seen as symbiotic, but was different from that in Greece and Rome: because the relationship was structural and because of the 'deep social chasm' between king and expert, the king was the empowered party: experts would ask the king for justice or favours.[37] The relationship might even be characterized as one of patronage.[38] Such asymmetry in the relationship is not found in Greece to such a degree, nor in Rome where the public experts and their clients were members of the elite (patronage also played a role in these circles but this was clearly not as structural or asymmetrical as in Mesopotamia).

In short, the expert was always part of the leader's 'religious capital'[39]—but his actual worth did not go unquestioned. This is primarily visible in Greece where the leader or client *chose* to consult an expert when he required it. This incidental basis was not nearly as prominent in Rome and Mesopotamia, where an expert served formally for a longer period of time. This element of choice on the side of the client must have affected the position of the Greek expert *homo divinans* in society, an enquiry which will form the greater part of this chapter.

Experts: Socio-Economic Status

In my analysis of the position of the divinatory expert in society, the concept of socio-economic status will play a central part. This term is used to determine the position of an individual in society by placing emphasis on his occupation. The three criteria by which this position is usually measured are education, income and career.[40] At least one addition to this list must be made: the evidence shows that an expert's social background was an important element of socio-economic status in the ancient world.

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[36] Yet, note that scholars also fulfilled the tasks of magnates under Esarhaddon: K. Radner, 'Royal decision-making: kings, magnates, and scholars' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 358–379, at 372–374.

[37] Astrologers: SAA 10 58 rev. 4–21; SAA 10 86; SAA 10 93; *bārû:* SAA 10 178; SAA 10 180.

[38] For the quote and on the depiction of this relationship as one of patronage see Radner, 'Royal decision-making', 363–365; E. Frahm, 'Keeping company with men of learning: the king as scholar' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 508–532, at 525; Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 605–607.

[39] J.N. Bremmer, 'Prophets, seers, and politics in Greece, Israel, and early modern Europe', *Numen* 40 (1993) 150–183, at 155.

[40] Introductions to socio-economic status, among many others, in: G. Marshall, *Oxford dictionary of sociology* (Oxford 1998^2) s.v. status attainment.

Consequently, extra emphasis will be placed on family ties among experts as well as their gender and physique.

The basic assumption under investigation in a comparison of Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome is that more education, more income and more fame meant an individual was higher up in the socio-economic ranking. There are, however, no quantifiable data. Whereas sociologists would use relative percentages to 'measure' socio-economic status, the data necessary to do this are not available to ancient historians. However, historians can use a comparison, a method of research which is relative—as is the use of percentages—, in order to 'measure' the socio-economic status of people belonging to various groups. The confrontation between the various experts will lead to qualitative conclusions at a high level of abstraction. On account of the lacking data, I have only used three broad categories as designations of the experts' socio-economic status in the conclusion: low, middle and high socio-economic status.

This analysis will focus on the Greek *mantis*;[41] the Mesopotamian *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* and *bārû*; and the Roman *augur, decemvir* and *haruspex.* These experts are well attested in the sources—because of their prominence in divinatory practice, public duties or the high status of their core divinatory methods—, ensuring enough knowledge about their background and career has been passed down to be able to make a systematic comparison. Other experts and mythological accounts will be used as a complement and as a contrast.

Terminology

Terminology and Areas of Expertise: Greece

Before focusing on the experts singled out above, the different groups of divinatory experts, both those involved in public ('official') and private ('unofficial') divination, will briefly be discussed in relation to one another. The experts who concerned themselves with divination were many and the terminology used for these different groups of experts is often unclear. In what follows, a brief overview is provided, bearing mind that not all kinds of experts can be discussed, but only those who are encountered most frequently.

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[41] The *teratoskopos* also divined by means of observing signs, but as there are very few records of what exactly he did and how he differed from the *mantis* he will only be briefly mentioned in this account.

A small category of dependent experts was constituted out of the *prophētai* and *promanteis* (functioning as mouthpieces of the gods) and certainly in Hellenistic (and Roman) times the institutionalized *manteis*. These were linked to a sacred or oracular shrine—their precise functions are often hard to define.[42] Context is helpful: at Korope, for example, there would be a priest, a dependent divinatory expert, a secretary to the gods and representatives of the various colleges present at the oracle when it functioned,[43] while at Didyma—at least in Hellenistic times—the expert appears to have been assisted by other functionaries.[44] A certain division of labour might be assumed on the basis of this evidence.

In the category of independent experts there was the *oneiropolos*, who interpreted dreams, and the *teratoskopos*, who interpreted signs, usually those appearing spontaneously without having been requested. However, the independent experts who appeared most frequently—especially in Classical times—were the *chrēsmologoi* and (independent) *manteis*.[45] My use of the term 'independent' does not imply these experts were always itinerant: it means they did not normally have structural or even permanent employment.

There is, however, a discussion in the literature regarding in how far the actual occupations of these experts overlapped—some argue that their particular roles cannot always be distinguished from one another.[46]

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[42] J. Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*: independent diviners and the problem of authority' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 167–231, at 171; for Hellenistic and Roman times see A. Hupfloher, 'Mantische Spezialisten im Osten des Römerreiches' in: H. Cancik & J. Rüpke (eds), *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum: Koine und Konfrontationen* (Tübingen 2009) 273–287. The most extensive study of the *prophētēs* is still E. Fascher, *Profētēs: eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Gießen 1927) 1–75. These institutionalized *manteis* were thought to have worked until they died: L. Weniger, 'Die Seher von Olympia', *ARW* 18 (1915) 53–115, at 60.

[43] Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 22—where further references can be found.

[44] Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 78; H.W. Parke, *The oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London 1985) 41–42; 132. Cf. Morgan, 'Divination and society', 31–32. See for a much more detailed study A. Busine, 'The officials of oracular sanctuaries in Roman Asia Minor', *ARG* 8 (2006) 275–316; S. Georgoudi, 'Les porte-paroles des dieux: réflexions sur le personnel des oracles grecs' in: I. Chirassi Colombo & T. Seppilli (eds), *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione: atti del convegno Macerata-Norcia, settembre 1994* (Pisa 1999) 315–365, esp. 340–361. Note also the attention Georgoudi pays to the *Selloi* (who are not discussed here because I do not consider them to be *manteis*) at 335–340. Another group of functionaries at the oracle who are not discussed are the *Hosioi* at Delphi. See G. Jay-Robert, 'Les *Hosioi* de Delphes', *Euphrosyne* 25 (1997) 25–45.

[45] The term *chrēsmologos* seems to have appeared in the fifth century: earlier chresmologues, such as Musaios and Bakis, were only referred to in these terms from the time of Herotodos. See Dillerey, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 184–185.

[46] Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 170; Flower, *The seer*, 60–63 (considers the two professions to be related, but different); R. Garland, 'Priests and power', 82–85; H. Bowden,

For instance, the independent expert Lampon (480/470–410 BC) was referred to as a *chrēsmologos*, as a *mantis* (as well as an *exēgētēs*, a role not relevant here) and sometimes as both at the same time. However, the *mantis* was supposed to interpret both spontaneous and evoked signs;[47] the *chrēsmologos*, on the other hand, collected oracles and uttered these.[48] His trade was generally not deemed to be as prestigious as that of the *mantis* (although there were some exceptions).[49] It has been argued that this status had changed by Pausanias' time when a *mantis* seems to have been someone who based his divination on rational skills acquired through education, while the *chrēsmologos* had become an inspired speaker of oracles.[50]

All in all, it is hard to compare the esteem these various experts enjoyed since we know very little about dependent experts at the oracle sites. It appears, however, that the *mantis* was relatively highly esteemed within the category of experts.[51] Those such as the dream expert and the *chrēsmologos* followed suit, while it is difficult to say something about the dependent experts.

'Oracles for sale' in: P. Derow & R. Parker (eds), *Herodotos and his world: essays from a conference in memory of George Forrest* (Oxford 2003) 256–274, especially 261–264; Georgoudi, 'Les porte-paroles des dieux', 315–365, especially 327–328 but also *passim*. Especially her attempt to distinguish between *mantis, promantis* and *prophētēs* makes this article very worthwhile. Georgoudi shows that *mantis* and *promantis/prophētēs* cannot simply be distinguished in the sense that a *mantis* observed and the other two divined by means of auditory signs (345–347). The one distinction which can be convincingly made is that the *mantis* is not connected to a particular member of the supernatural, while the others are (331).

[47] An example is Pind. *Ol.* 6.65–70. Ascribing innate divine inspiration seems like a literary feature to me. For secondary literature see Bremmer, 'Capital of the seer', 98 where he argues that experts based their knowledge on expertise in the Archaic age but were later also connected to inspirational divination; Flower, *The seer*, 38; Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 168–170.

[48] As in, e.g., Hdt. 1.62.

[49] It was, e.g., perfectly possible for a *chrēsmologos* to be honoured with a statue: *SEG* 42 1065 (Kolophon, 200–150 BC); L. & J. Robert, 'Décret de Colophon pour un chresmologue de Smyrne appelé à diriger l'oracle de Claros', *BCH* 116 (1992) 279–291. He was also allowed to advise the assembly (Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 112). On the *mantis* who was held in high esteem see the discussion and references in Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 49–56.

[50] Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 170: the passage referred to is Paus. 1.34.4 (yet, in Paus. 2.13.7 it appears that a expert who was inspired to dream was called a *mantis*, too—matters are not clear-cut); A.W. Argyle, 'Χρησμολόγοι and Μάντεις', *CR* n.s. 20 (1970) 139.

[51] Note that some argue that perhaps the *manteis*—but also the chresmologues—became less important over time, especially after the Sicilian expedition. See: Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 113–115.

Terminology and Areas of Expertise: Mesopotamia

Best known are experts employed by the palace, who had the task to make sure that no harm befell the king.[52] These experts fell into the category of scholars (*ummânu*) or were 'scribe-experts'—it is often hard to distinguish between these two categories.[53] The overarching Neo-Assyrian concept of *ummânu* consisted of five different disciplines: the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* (celestial expert/astrologer), the *bārû* ('*haruspex*'), the *āšipu* (doctor/exorcist), the *asû* (medical practitioner) and the *kalû* (lamentation singer who was not involved in divination).[54] Note that the practice of the *āšipu* overlapped with, or was at least related to, that of the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* and *bārû* but that he is not discussed as a divinatory expert here.[55] The following passage distinguishes the various disciplines (but leaves out the *kalû*), and adds the bird-expert (the *dāgil iṣṣūrē*, not an *ummânu*) to the list: 'The scribes, experts, exorcists, physicians, observers of birds and palace officials dwelling in the city'.[56]

Although a clear-cut division of roles is artificial, it is possible to make some distinctions. The *bārû* was a specialist in interpreting evoked signs, mainly by means of inspection of *exta*. Some have argued that he was also involved in the observation of the flight of birds, lecanomancy and libanomancy. Ulla Jeyes argues that, in the Old Babylonian period, the *bārû* performed extispicy, lecanomancy, libanomancy, aleuromancy "[…] and a peculiar form of divination which involved observation of spots or discolouring on slaughtered and plucked fowl".[57] However, Eleanor Rob-

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[52] There were those who claimed to speak on behalf of the gods (and can therefore not be discussed here, because they are no divinatory expert according to my definition). The *maḫḫû* was an ecstatic figure, who provided the king with messages by interpreting dreams, speech omens, portents and signs. The *raggim(t)u* was another prophetic character with a perceived capability to communicate with the divine. Both *maḫḫû* and *raggimu* were probably connected to the temple. Although the two are distinguished in the texts, again it is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between the one and the other. Their function was that of servant of the deity, and in this capacity they could 'express demands to the king' and comment on his cultic and political functioning: De Jong, *Isaiah among the ancient Near Eastern prophets*, 220–236. Cf. Stökl, *Prophecy in the ancient Near East*, 111–120.

[53] E.g., K. van der Toorn, *Scribal culture and the making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA 2007) 57; Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 45.

[54] Cf. Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 95.

[55] The *asû* and *kalû* do not seem to have been involved in divinatory practice.

[56] Publication: S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian scholars* (SAA 10) (Helsinki 1993) 7. Translation: *Chicago Assyrian dictionary*, s.v. *dāgil iṣṣūrē*. [LÚ]A.BA.MEŠ LÚḪAL.MEŠ [LÚ]MAŠ.MAŠ.MEŠ LÚA.ZU.MEŠ [LÚ]*da-gíl*-MUŠEN.MEŠ.

[57] Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy*, 15.

son has shown that the Neo-Assyrian *bārû*, although he did have knowledge of other areas outside the specialization of extispicy, did not practise in these areas.[58] The *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* specialized in unevoked, mainly heavenly signs but was also involved in other areas. The *dāgil iṣṣūrē* apparently observed birds only.

The *bārû* was held high esteem.[59] The reasons for this esteem were the learning and knowledge the *bārû* (and the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*, who is—in his turn—thought to have been held in even higher esteem than the *bārû*)[60] needed to possess, something he shared with the wise man, the *apkallu*: "I am an expert, I am a man of learning"; "wise [*emqu*] member of the guild of experts".[61] The *bārû* were united in a guild, to which new members were admitted on the basis of their wisdom and learning. In contrast, the *šā'il(t)u* [a non-*ummânu* expert] was qualified by "age, social status, or a personal charisma, inherited or magically acquired".[62] The *šā'il(t)u* interpreted both dreams and the flight of birds, and divined by smoke. He or she and other non-*ummânu* experts were held in lower esteem than the *ummânu* because they had no extensive scholarly training, they were not organized into a powerful guild like that of the *bārû* or perhaps for other unknown reasons.[63]

Terminology and Areas of Expertise: Rome

The public experts in Roman Republican times can be split up into three groups: first, the *augures* who presided over the auspices;[64] second, the interpreters of prodigies who were consulted by the Senate when signs occurred: the keepers of the Sibylline Books—the *decemviri*

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58 Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 623.

59 For the Old Babylonian period see I. Starr, *The rituals of the diviner* (Malibu 1983) 5.

60 Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 58.

61 W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian wisdom literature* (Oxford 1959) 211, line 16; J.A. Craig, *Assyrian and Babylonian religious texts: being prayers, oracles, hymns &c.* (Leipzig 1895–1897) 60, line 2.

62 The *šā'il(t)u* interpreted both dreams and the flight of birds and divined by smoke. A.L. Oppenheim adds lecanomancy and necromancy to his activities: Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 223.

63 Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 221.

64 The number of *augures* at any one time is unclear—at first, there seem to have been three, later four or six and from 300 BC there were certainly nine. The dynamics and evolution in auspicia in this period, to a far greater extent than can be done here, have been discussed by J. Scheid, 'Le rite de auspices à Rome: quelle évolution? Réflexions sur la transformation de la divination publique des Romains entre le III^{e} et le I^{er} siècle avant notre ère' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 109–128.

sacris faciundis[65]—and the Etruscan *haruspices*), and third, the readers of entrails (*haruspices*).[66] Although there is much confusion about the exact division between, and roles of, the different *haruspices*, it may be deducted that the latter group of *haruspices* could either be assigned to a magistrate in the army or they could work privately.[67] Some would argue that the *pontifices* should also be ranked among the divinatory experts but since they were only marginally involved in the interpretation of certain signs, they are not discussed in what follows.[68]

The *nobiles* who became members of the bodies of *decemviri* or the *augures* would hold life-long tenure: they had become members of a prestigious priestly college and should be considered part of the institutions of the State.[69] The *collegium* of *augures* would be asked by the Senate to observe and explain the *auspicia* and *auguria* (interpreting augural law) and to offer explanations of errors in the performance of a ritual—while individual augures could also do this on their own accord.[70] In other words, the *collegium* examined the potential success of an undertaking. It was part of the task of the incumbent magistrates, with the assistance of their *pullarii* ('chicken-keepers'), to take the *auspicia* before any official

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[65] On the role of the Sibylline Books cf. p. 144. First there were two men consulting the Sibylline books, then ten (from 367) and from the time of Sulla their number was fifteen and later this number was raised again (S.M. Rasmussen, *Public portents in Republican Rome* (Rome 2003) 169–170). I shall call them *decemviri* here as this number was used during most of the Republic, the timeframe I deal with here.

[66] North, 'Diviners and divination', 51; 55. Cf. Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293; G.J. Szemler, 'Priesthood and priestly careers' in: *ANRW*, vol. 16.3, 2314–2331, at 2325; D.S. Potter, *Prophets and emperors: human and divine authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA 1994) 151–158; J. Rüpke, 'Divination romaine et rationalité grecque dans la Rome du II^{e} siècle avant notre ère' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 279–500.

[67] North, 'Diviners and divination', 55. For criteria which could be established to distinguish between the two see M.L. Haack, 'Haruspices publics et privés: tentative d'une distinction', *REA* 104 (2002) 111–133. It should be noted that the 'Roman' and 'Etruscan' ways of performing extispicy differed. Nevertheless, I deal with this as one tradition here—the sources do not allow the two to be clearly distinguished.

[68] Cf. K. Latte, 'Orakel' in: idem, *Kleine Schriften: zu Religion, Recht, Literatur und Sprache der Griechen und Römer* (München 1968) 152–192, at 179–187. Those dealing with divination in Republican Rome do not mention the *pontifices* as experts as such (except for Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 170–171). Cf. R.L. Gordon, 'Pontifex, Pontifices' in: *NewP*. Visited 01-04-2011.

[69] Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293; G.J. Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic: a study of interactions between priesthoods and magistracies* (Brussels 1972) 21–46; Szemler, 'Priesthood', 2325.

[70] Cf. J. Linderski, 'The augural law' in: *ANRW*, vol. 16.3, 2146–2312; Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 298–299.

action, mainly by using birds, but also by keeping track of thunder and lightning—expressing the favour or disfavour of the supernatural.[71]

Prodigies could be remedied by gaining advice from the Etruscan *haruspices* or by consulting the Sibylline Books, which only the *decemviri* were allowed to do if requested by the Senate.[72] The *haruspices* were a different body of experts consisting of members of the Etruscan oligarchy (and perhaps later of the Roman elite)[73] and were consulted about signs which they were able explain with the help of their *libri rituales*.[74] These *haruspices* became more important during the Late Republic and were at some point in time united in an *ordo*.[75]

In the private sphere, other *haruspices*—as already referred to above these are often not easily distinguishable from their counterparts functioning in a public context—performed extispicy, read nuptial auspices and interpreted oracles—provided by *sortileges* and *vates*—and interpreted dreams.[76] The *hariolus* was considered to act as the possessed mouthpiece of the supernatural on occasion, and astrologers examined the heavens and read horoscopes. These individuals were not primarily concerned with divination related to State matters, but with private affairs. The elite regarded these experts in private affairs as lowly beings and their practice as unnecessary and undesirable.[77] The status of private, unofficial, experts was correspondingly low.

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[71] J. Scheid, *An introduction to Roman religion* (Edinburgh 2003) 112–117.

[72] On the Sibylline Books D. Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen (753–27 v.Chr.): Quellen, Terminologie, Kommentar, historische Entwicklung* (Stuttgart 2007) 739–744.

[73] MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43–59.

[74] Cf. Scheid, *Roman religion*, 123–124. See MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43–59. It is not possible to provide a complete bibliography for the *haruspex* here, but see one of the—still—canonical publications dealing with the *haruspex*: C.O. Thulin, *Die Etruskischen Disciplin* 3 vol. 3 (Göteborg 1909).

[75] Note there is no consensus on the development of this *ordo.* For different opinions: MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 47–50; G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (München 1912) 543; 548 for the idea that at the end of the Republic there existed an *ordo haruspicum*. Other groups might have existed outside Rome. Cf. Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen*, 733–735; the bibliography (who discusses both kinds of *haruspices*) in the recent work by M.L. Haack, *Prosopographie des haruspices romains* (Pisa 2006); M.L. Haack, 'Les haruspices II. Les haruspices romains' in: M.F. Baslez & F. Prévot (eds), *Prosopographie et histoire religieuse: actes du colloque tenu en l'Université Paris XII-Val de Marne les 27 & 28 octobre 2000* (Paris 2005) 187–206.

[76] Many references to primary sources on private haruspices: S. Estienne & M.L. Haack, 'Spécialistes (*haruspex*, mage, sorcier)' in: *ThesCRA*, vol. 5, 145–146.

[77] E.g., Cic. *Div.* 2.24.

Terminology: Conclusions

All three communities show experts involved in public and in private divination. In practice, those (mainly) involved in private divination seem to be held in lower esteem.

All in all, the activities of Roman experts were restricted to a certain area of expertise—at least if they were officially employed and had a public function. The Mesopotamian *bārû* was also specialized to quite an extent (as was the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*, but he could also be active in more than one area). The Greek *manteis* were jacks-of-all-trades: they were active in interpreting many different kinds of signs and practised a variety of divinatory methods.

Background

Gender

Divinatory experts in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome were almost always men. There are very few female experts attested in our sources. The most eye-catching are the women who functioned as the mouthpieces of the supernatural: the female *raggintu* and *maḫḫūtu* from Mesopotamia fit this description. Simo Parpola counts eight such individuals in the sources from the oracle of Ištar at Arbela.[78] The Greek Pythia and the Sibyls were invariably women too.[79] However, because these individuals did not *interpret* signs provided by the supernatural they fall outside the scope of this chapter.[80]

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[78] Stökl, *Prophecy in the ancient Near East*, 121–127 (and 121–123 on the gender of disputed cases, which have previously been thought to swap genderroles. Cf. Weippert, '"König, fürchte dich nicht!"', 33–34. Both respond to Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies*, il–lii).

[79] Just one recent title (although there is much literature): Flower, *The seer*, 215–239. For the Sibyl see J.L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles with introduction, translation, and commentary on the first and second books* (Oxford 2007); a great number of relevant articles in: Chirassi Colombo & Seppilli, *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari*. On the variety of different Sibyls see also sources such as Ael. *VH* 12.35.

[80] This is an uncertain and therefore controversial issue. I adhere to the idea that the Pythia would only relate the words of Apollo—some even claim she was in a trance-like state when she did this, thereby even cancelling out her own personality. The Pythia will at least have needed an official who 'translated' her words into hexameters: she was simply the medium, just as a tree or the moon was a medium in which the sign could manifest itself. See the bibliography in E. Suarez de la Torre, 'Les dieux de Delphes et l'histoire du sanctuaire' in: V. Pirenne-Delforge (ed.), *Les panthéons des cités, des origines à la Périégèse de Pausanias: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Liège du 15 au 17 mai 1997* (Liège

A few more references to female experts in the field of divination can be found in the literary sources: a mythological Greek woman called Manto (a name suitable for a divining woman) was supposedly the daughter of Teiresias and mother of Mopsos.[81] And there are more literary indications which point to the presence of real female experts. For instance, a third-century BC poem by Posidippos of Pella refers to a woman who is said to perform divination by means of birds:

> For aquiring a servant, the grey heron is your best
> bird of omen—Asterie the prophetess [*mantis*] calls on it.
> From it Hieron took his cue, hiring one man
> for his fields, another—just as luckily—for his house.[82]

There is also a Greek *mantis* on a relief from around 420 from Mantinea, known as 'Diotima of Mantinea' (after the wise woman Diotima mentioned by Plato). A woman wearing a *peplos* carries a liver, with which she presumably will perform extispicy. Admittedly a sceptic might dismiss Posidippos' poem and the relief from Mantinea as artistic representations of mythical female experts.[83] One of the few scraps of more reliable evidence is that of the woman Satyra in the third century who is referred to as a *mantis* in her epitaph;[84] furthermore the 'female astrologer' Aglaonike was supposed to have lived in the second century AD;[85] and there

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1998) 61–87; see also the references in Versnel, *Transition and reversal*, 283 n. 188; S. Price, 'Delphi and divination' in: P.E. Easterling & J.V. Muir (eds), *Greek religion and society* (Cambridge 1985) 128–154. For literature on the state of mind of the Pythia: I. Chirassi Colombo, 'Le Dionysos oraculaire', *Kernos* 4 (1991) 205–217; J.S. Clay, 'Fusing the boundaries: Apollo and Dionysos at Delphi', *Métis* 11 (1996) 83–100; D. Lehoux, 'Drugs and the Delphic oracle', *CW* 101 (2007) 41–55; L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology and spirit possession: a reconsideration of the Pythia's role at Delphi', *JHS* 115 (1995) 69–86.

[81] Flower, *The seer*, 212; D. Lyons, 'Manto and Manteia in the myths and cults of heroines' in: I. Chirassi Colombo & T. Seppilli (eds), *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione* (Pisa 1999) 227–237.

[82] Number 26 (IV 36–39) as discussed by Flower, *The seer*, 214. Translation: F. Nisetich in K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The new Posidippus: a Hellenistic poetry book* (Oxford 2005) 23. Cf. B. Acosta-Hughes, E. Kosmetatou & M. Baumbach (eds), *Labored in papyrus leaves: perspectives on an epigram collection attributed to Posidippus* (*P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309*) (Washington 2004) *passim*. Edition: C. Austin & G. Bastianini, *Posidippi Pellaei Quae supersunt omnia* (Milan 2002) 48. Οἰκῆα κτήσασθαι ἐρωιδιὸς ὄρνις ἄριστος | πελλός, ὃν Ἀ[σ]τερίη μάντις ἐφ' ἱρὰ καλεῖ· | ὧι πεισθεὶς Ἱέρων ἐκτ[ή]σατο τὸν μὲν ἐπ' ἀγροῦ | τὸν δ' οἴκων ἀγαθῶι σὺν ποδὶ κηδεμόνα.

[83] Flower, *The seer*, 212–214.

[84] Cf. Flower, *The seer*, 214 n. 8, referring to *SEG* 35.626.

[85] She is referred to as an 'astrologer woman': Plut. *Mor De def. or.* 417a. It is uncertain whether this might be said to be a similar function to *mantis* but she is included in the argument. Cf. S. Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos, magos y astrólogos de la antigüedad* (Madrid 1997) s.v. Aglaonice.

was another divinatory woman called Athenais.[86] All in all, Greek female *manteis* are attested, but only rarely.

There appear to have been female dream-interpreters (*šā'iltu*) and *bārītu* in the Old Babylonian period,[87] but no female *bārītu* or *ṭupšarratu* is referred to in the Neo-Assyrian sources.[88] In public divination at Rome, partly because the male elite magistrates were also the divinatory experts, no females were active as public experts. In the informal realm, the existence of female experts cannot be ruled out.[89]

Physical Condition

No special rules decreed the physical condition of Greek experts (beyond the normal regulations applicable at sanctuaries). A Greek expert could, if myth is something to go by, theoretically (although this might be problematical in practice) even be blind and this handicap might actually have added to his authority.[90] Mythical Teiresias lost his eyesight but practiced as an expert.[91] Another—and this time historical—example is that of Hegesistratos, a *mantis* who had his foot cut off and still practised as an expert afterwards.[92]

A Roman member of a *collegium* had to be free of 'bodily defect'.[93] Like the Roman expert, the Mesopotamian *bārû* had to answer physical requirements: "the diviner [*bārû*] of impure descent, not without defect in body and limbs, with squinting eyes, chipped teeth, a cut-off finger,

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[86] Str. 14.645; 7.814. Cf. Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos*, s.v. Atenais.

[87] Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 221–222: "In the TCL [Textes Cuneiformes Louvre] II 5 there is a reference to a female *bārû* ('We shall ask here the *sa'iltu*-priestesses, the *bārītu*-priestesses and the spirits of the dead and then Assur will treaten you!')." Note that the person posing the enquiry is a woman too.

[88] Unless C.J. Mullo-Weir really has pinpointed a female *bārû* (this is, according to many, most probably not so): 'Four hymns to Gula', *JRAS* 61 (1929) 1–18, at 12–14 (K 232 rev. 11; 29).

[89] Plaut. *Mil.* 693.

[90] There appears to be a *topos* of 'blind divinatory experts'. See for a number of Greek blind experts (although I would contest if these experts gained an 'inner sight' in *exchange* for their 'outer sight') and more explanation about how they functioned Flower, *The seer*, 37; 50–51. The hand of Diopeithes, a fifth-century chresmologue, was permanently injured. He was not a *mantis*, but his case seems to correspond to the mythological evidence that it was not necessary to be physically perfect in order to divine: Ar. *Av.* 987–988; Plut. *Vit. Ages.* 3.3–4.

[91] For Teiresias as being blind (due to whichever cause) see, e.g., Eur. *Bacch.* 210; Soph. *Ant.* 988–990; Soph. *OT* 300–303.

[92] On Hegesistratos see Hdt. 9.37.1; 9.38.1; 9.41.4.

[93] Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 31. Cf. for different emic options of why this might be so: Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Rom.* 281c.

a ruptured(?) testicle, suffering from leprosy [...]".[94] was not allowed to approach the gods of extispicy, Šamaš and Adad. This was perhaps motivated by the practical consideration that the expert could not perfectly perform the divinatory ritual if he suffered from defective eyes, teeth and so on.[95] This theory is supported by the fact we know of no such physical requirements for astrologers (who presumably did need sharp eyesight). Emphasis on Mesopotamian physical requirements could also reflect the idea that the Mesopotamian *bārû* was supposedly treading before the gods and was physically close to them while performing an extispicy—this also explains why the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* did not, as far as is known, had to be physically perfect: scanning the skies for signs did not entail direct contact with the supernatural.

Career Span

Greek or Roman sources which tell us explicitly about experts' careers are scarce. What *is* known is that *augures* and *decemviri* retained their membership in the *collegia* until their deaths.[96] For official *haruspices* and Roman private experts it can be assumed that they, too, worked until they died, providing there was demand for their services. This can also be assumed for wandering and institutionalized Greek *manteis*.[97] For Mesopotamia there is more information, albeit still fragmentary. Parpola provides a table from which it appears that scholars at the court worked there for 8.08 years on average.[98] It should then be concluded that the

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[94] Edition and translation: W.G. Lambert, 'The qualifications of Babylonian diviners' in: S.M. Maul (ed.), *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994: tikip santakki mala bašmu* (Groningen 1998) 141–155, at 149, 30'–32' & 152, 30'–32'. DUMU ^{LÚ}ḪAL *šá za-ru-šú la* KÙ *ù šu-u ina gat-ti u* ŠID.MEŠ-*šú* | *la šuk-lu-lu zaq-tu* IGI.MIN.MEŠ *ḫe-šír* ZÚ.MEŠ | *nak-pi* ŠU.SI ŠIR DIR.KUR.RA *ma-le-e* SAḪAR.ŠUB.BA-*e*.

[95] Enmeduranki text lines 28–37: Lambert, 'Qualifications', 149 and 152; B. Böck, 'Physiognomy in ancient Mesopotamia and beyond: from practice to handbook' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 199–224, at 218–219. This is not to say that the experts' purity was the only prerequisite for a successful approach to the supernatural: attributes such as the *erinnu* (usually translated as cedar rod) and so on played a role (Cf. on the *erinnu*: Wilson, 'Use of *erinnu*', 95–98). Objects could also play a role in Greece: a tradition of using stones to aid the divinatory process, both by layman and expert, seems to have existed—see the texts collected in R. Halleux & J. Schamp (trans.), *Les lapidaires grecs* (Paris 1985) *passim*.

[96] Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 29.

[97] Weniger, 'Die Seher', 60.

[98] The table on which this number is based on consists of 25 scholars who are thought to have worked at court for a number of years. In total (and as far as the source materials go), they have worked for a total of 202 years (this is inclusive of start and enddates). The

actual period of practising at court was rather short. If the experts worked until their deaths, they must have been relatively old when they began to work for the palace.[99] This could be explained by the fact that their training had to be completed before they started practicing as experts. This short career could also imply either a high death rate, a long period of training or a long time between training and appointment as an expert to the king (during which an expert would have been working in the undocumented realm of private, unofficial, divination, for example). This is a striking difference with the Greek and Roman situations, in which training was not regulated as such and individuals could apparently commence divining without spending time following an official training. Greek and Roman experts would probably learn on the job, becoming more skilled as they continued to practise (cf. pp. 82–87). Therefore, they must have been able to practise for longer—if they worked until their deaths.

Family

We know the names of five Greek 'mantic families': the Branchidai, the Iamidai, Klutiadai, Telliadai and the Melampodidai, who claimed to be descendants of such mythical experts as Melampos, Teiresias, or Kalchas.[100] Some members of these 'mantic families' were employed at oracles or other sanctuaries where the records of them being active in the divinatory business were kept—making it easy to track family relationships.[101] The sources also show that "it was fundamentally important that the seer was believed to be what he claimed to be, literally the blood descendant

table is found at: S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* vol. 2a (Kevelaer 1970–1983) 471. I have taken all the scholars Parpola mentions, including those who were not involved in divination, in order to assemble more data on which to base the calculations. I am assuming that other scholars had an equally rigorous training.

[99] Although we know of at least one expert who fell into disgrace and had his career cut short.

[100] 'Biographies' of a number of mythical experts can be found in Löffler, *Die Melampodie*, 31–58.

[101] For an example of such an endeavour see Weniger, 'Die Seher', 53–115. For one example of such a family—but too late in time for the scope of this study—see S.B. Zoumbaki, *Elis und Olympia in der Kaiserzeit: das Leben einer Gesellschaft zwischen Stadt und Heiligtum auf prosopographischer Grundlage* (Athens 2001) 340–341; 121. See for epigraphical evidence the lists of *manteis* at Olympia (late sources: 36 BC–265 AD) published in W. Dittenberger & K. Purgold, *Die Inschriften von Olympia* (Berlin 1896) 59–141.

of another seer."[102] Being part of a 'mantic family' was an ideal way to gain authority (the inheritance of knowledge was implied) which prompted experts to claim dubious biological relationships with other existing experts: Herodotos describes how the *mantis* Deiphonos went around Greece claiming to be the son of the famous expert Euenios.[103] According to Herodotos this was not actually true—but this claim evidently helped Deiphonos to acquire authority.[104] A historical example of a divinatory expert who followed in his father's footsteps is the third-century BC expert Thrasyboulos, whose father was said to have been the expert Aineas.[105] A late source such as Artemidoros, who addressed Books IV and V of the *Oneirocritica* to his son who was also an interpreter of dreams, supports this notion.[106]

'Keeping it in the family' may seem to have been the natural thing to do: by training his son the father would, first, ensure that the family business was carried on. Second, if the expert trained his biological son, this could be considered a way to provide a member of the family with skills he could use to make his own living and, eventually, support the family. However, apart from the materials discussed above, evidence for the existence of actual biological relationships between historical Greek experts is sparse. It is possible to establish *stemmata* for the families of the three experts Kleobolos, Telenikos and Philochoros among others. However, none of their relatives were known as an expert themselves.[107] A family of experts which is often referred to in modern literature, is the Spartan branch of the family of the Iamidai.[108] Although it may be assumed that some (or even many) members of this family were experts, that does not necessarily apply to each member. Below is a *stemma* of this family of the Iamidai:

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[102] M.A. Flower, 'The Iamidae: a mantic family and its public image' in: B. Dignas & K. Trampedach (eds), *Practitioners of the divine: Greek priests and officials from Homer to Heliodorus* (Cambridge, MA 2008) 187–206, at 192.

[103] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 32: Deifonos (18).

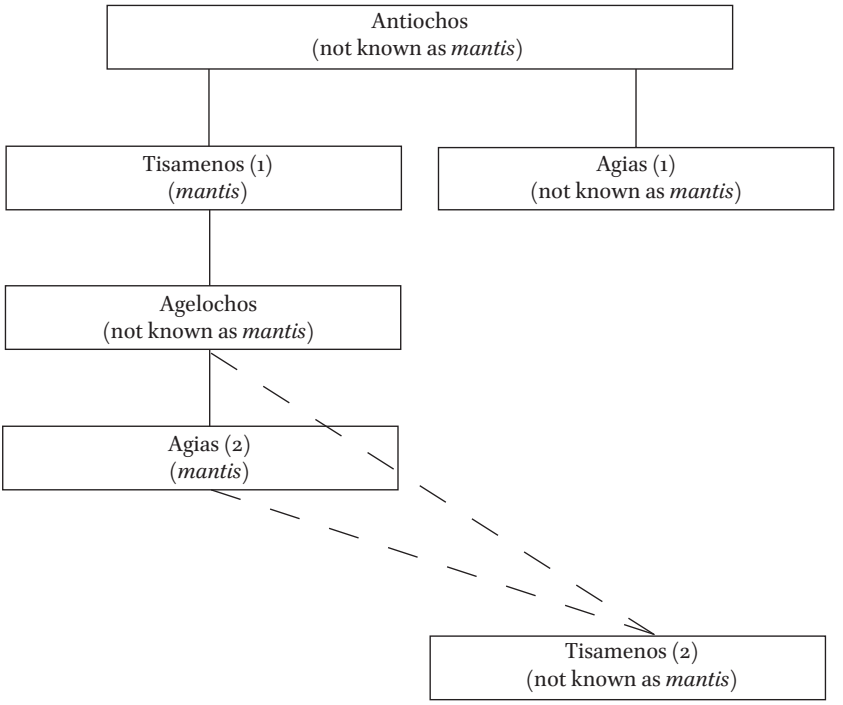
[104] Flower, 'The Iamidae', 192.

[105] Member of the clan of Iamids. On Thrasyboulos see further Paus. 6.13.11; 6.14.9.

[106] Artem. 4 Prooemium; 5 Prooemium.

[107] Kleobolos' father was Glaukos; Telenikos' son was Telenikos whose son was Teleas, and his descendant Telenikos; Philochoros was married to Archestrate, had a brother called Demetrios: his father was Kyknos whose father was Philochoros. None of the family members mentioned above was called a *mantis*. They lived in the fifth, fourth and fourth/third centuries: there are too few data available to provide a diachronic perspective. See Kett, *Prosopographie*, 79–80.

[108] Flower, 'The Iamidae', 187–206.



Antiochos was father of Tisamenos and of Agias. Only his name is known and the only argument for considering him a *mantis* is that he is the father of a *mantis*—his other son, Agias (1) was not known as a divinatory expert. His son Tisamenos was definitely an expert: he is designated as such in the sources.[109] Tisamenos' son, Agelochos, is himself not known as a *mantis* but, because his father and son were, he is also assumed to have been one.[110] Agelochos' son Agias (2) was a famous *mantis*, and was even honoured with two statues, one in Sparta and one in Delphi.[111] Tisamenos (2) was probably the brother or son of Agias, but nothing is known about any possible mantic activities. The sources for this *stemma* are incomplete. It may be that not all of the Iamidai were experts.[112]

[109] Hdt. 9.33.1; Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 11.2; Paus. 6.14.13. On Tisamenos (1) A. Schachter, 'The seer Tisamenos and the Klytiadai', *CQ* 50 (2000) 292–295.

[110] Paus. 3.11.5.

[111] Paus. 3.11.5; Paus. 10.9.7. Kett, *Prosopographie*, 20: Agias (3); 79; Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos*, 48.

[112] It is possible to argue both sides of the story and I am convinced caution should be taken here. Examples of conclusions drawn are, e.g., Schachter, 'Tisamenos and the Klytiadai', 292–295 or Weniger, 'Die Seher', 53–115.

Although some argue differently, we must bear in mind Fontenrose's suggestion that the 'family relationships' between Greek *manteis* might have been based on relationships other than those of blood: "whether the *Branchidae* were a clan (*genos*), extended family, or a college or association (*synodos, thiasos, koinon*) cannot be said. The terms are not mutually exclusive; an extended family may become a clan, and associations of men engaged in a common trade or profession or activity were often organised as *genê*; new entrants were adopted into them, and they claimed descent from a common ancestor [...]."[113] Although the sources might prefer to speak of families, potential experts to swell the ranks of these 'families' or 'clans' could have been selected on the basis of potential: those selected in this way also acquired the necessary authority.

In Mesopotamia there was a relatively large number of families of *ummanû*, consisting of members with various specializations (such as scribe, divinatory expert or physician). In view of the institutionalization of the professions, an individual could hardly have claimed descent on a false basis: he would have been found out. Unquestionably adoption of individuals into families could have taken place—but this generally only happened if the adoptive father did not have a natural son. The idea of families of *ummanû* corresponds to the literary texts which prescribe that someone like Enmeduranki should be born into a particular family of Nippur, Sippar or Babylon:[114] certain families brought forth the scribal elite who could specialize in divination, which was not to be taught to others who were born outside of these families. A goldsmith's son, for example, could not learn about divination because he was not from one of the suitable families:

> Parruṭu, a goldsmith of the household of the queen, has, like the king and the crown prince, bought a Babylonian, and settled him in his own house. He has taught exorcistic literature to his son; extispicy omens have been explained to him, (and) he has even studied gleanings from *Enūma Anu Enlil*, and this right before the king, my lord! Let the king, my lord, write to his servant on account of this matter.[115]

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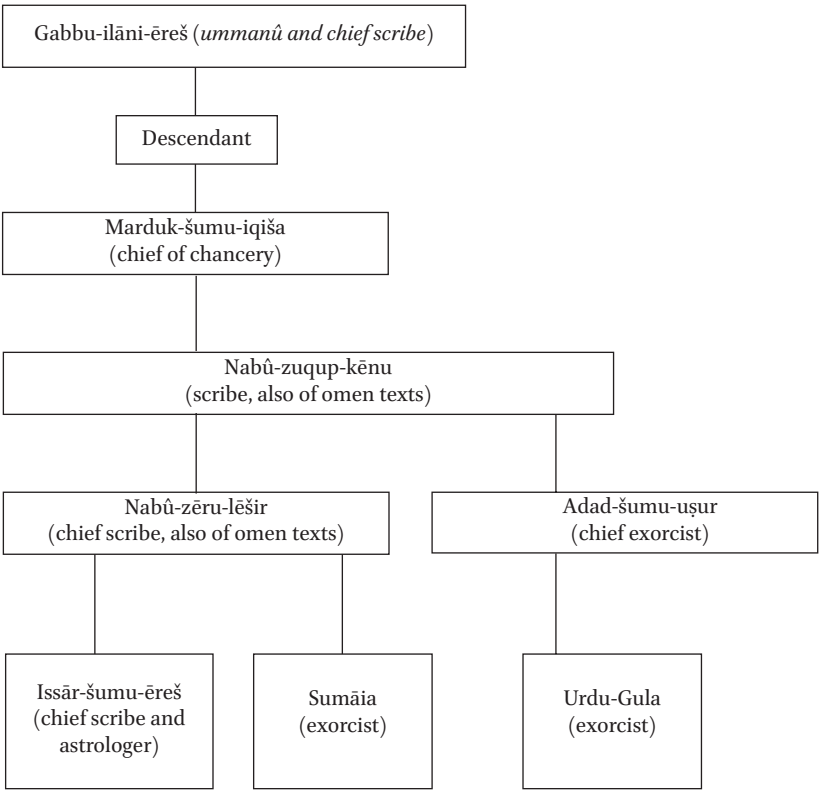
[113] Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 77. See also the Telmessoi Fontenrose refers to on page 78. Flower, *The seer*, 38 argues differently.

[114] Lambert, 'Qualifications', 142. See the Enmeduranki text ll.10–15. In his article about the catalogue of authors, Lambert mentions one *bārû* and his ancestor, but it is unsure what the profession this ancestor was. Therefore, we do not get to know much more on this topic: W.G. Lambert, 'A catalogue of texts and authors', *JCS* 16 (1962) 59–77, at 75.

[115] SAA 16 65 2–14. Edition and translation M. Luukko & G. Van Buylaere, *The political correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 16) (Helsinki 2002). EN-*iá lik-ru-ub* ^{m}*pa-ru!-ṭu* |

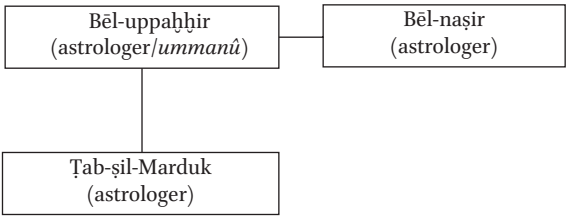
With the aid of *The prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian empire*, families of scribes and scholars can be located, an example of which is the following:[116]



LÚ*SIMUG.KUG.GI *ša* É! MÍ—É.GAL | *ki-i* LUGAL DUMU—LUGAL DUMU—KÁ.DINGIR.KI | *ina* ŠÀ-*bi* KUG.UD *i-si-qi ina* É *ra-mi-ni-šú* | *ú-se-ši-ib!-šú* IM.GÍD.DA | *ina* ŠÀ-bi LÚ**a-ši-pu-te a-na* DUMU-*šú* | *iq-ṭí-bi* UZU.MEŠ *i-ba-áš-ši* | *ša* LÚ**ba-ru-u-te uk-tal-li-mu-šú* | *li-iq-te ša*! 1! UD—*a-na*—dEN.LÍL | *i-ba-áš-ši lu e-ta-mar* | *i-na pa-ni ša* LUGAL EN-*ía* | *ina* UGU *da-ba-bi an-ni-e* | LUGAL *be-lí a-na* ARAD-*šú liš-pu-*ʳ*ra*ˀ.

[116] For references see S. Parpola, K. Radner & H.D. Baker (eds), *The prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian empire* (Helsinki 1998–2011). One more family: it appears from SAA 10 160 that Marduk-šāpik-zēri (astrologer and scholar) was the son of another scholar; it appears from Hunger, *Kolophone*, 397 that Marduk-bāni-apli (scribe and *bārû*) was the father of [.]-ibni (apprentice scribe); it appears from Hunger, *Kolophone*, 503:2 that Nabû-pāšir (*bārû*) was the father of Nabû-ušallim (scribe); it appears from SAA 8 473 rev. 3; 8 536 rev. 6 that Bēl-ušallim (scholar) was the father of another scholar whose name we do not know; it appears from SAA 4 334: rev. 4 that Marduk-šumu-uṣur (chief *bārû*) was the father of a *bārû* whose name we do not know.

However, if a mantic family is defined as a family producing at least two named individuals explicitly referred to as divinatory expert in two successive generations, there are few cases which fit these requirements.[117] Still, in the following family, two brothers were both experts and one son became an expert as well:[118]



In early Rome the *augures* and *decemviri* were initially chosen (by their peers) from the elite, consisting of patricians, but from 300 BC (the passing of the *lex Ogulnia*) plebeians were included—putting an end to the exclusive patrician claim to religious expertise. Another change was that the later *augures* and *decemviri* could also be elected.[119] There was a restricted but still fairly large number of families which could potentially produce experts (by biological or adoptive means), but the group of actual experts remained small: sons would succeed their fathers in *collegia* and one person could be a member of both the *collegia* of *augures* and of

[117] Whether or not members of these families were adopted is still debated. An introduction to the adoption of boys in Neo-Assyrian times is K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (Helsinki 1997) 137–140.

[118] I have not dealt with the relationship described in SAA 160 36 because it is unclear what the father of this astrologer did. It is certain, however, he was also a scholar of some kind. See the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian empire* for information: sources used to track this mantic family are SAA 8 447: rev. 6; 8, 448: rev. 2; 8 448; 8 445 rev. 3. Other references to father and son relationships are, e.g., in K 6055 2 = K 11097 3 (*BiOr* 14 (1957) 191; K. 9766 obv. 1; K 3819+ obv. 4 (*BiOr* 14 (1957) 192.

[119] Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 29–31; J. Linderski, 'Quindecimviri sacris faciundis' in: *NewP.* Visited 29-03-2011; J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: die Mitglieder der Priesterschaften und das sakrale Funktionspersonal römischer, griechischer, orientalischer und jüdisch-christlicher Kulte in der Stadt Rom von 300 v. Chr. bis 499 n. Chr* vol. 3 (Wiesbaden 2005) 1421. Examples of primary sources are Liv. 6.37.13; Liv. 3.32.3; Liv. 10.6.6–10; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 287de who suggests augurs were chosen for life (even if they committed a crime they could remain an augur) because of their skill, not because they held an office.

the *decemviri*.[120] One restrictive rule was that two members of the same *gens* could not be in the same *collegium*.[121]

The public *haruspices* were probably first chosen from the Etruscan elite, and perhaps later also from the Roman elite.[122] Owing to the late organization of the *haruspices* we are unsure but the situation might have been comparable to that of *augures* and *decemviri*.[123]

Background: Conclusions

In Greece the idea of biologically related experts is rather less certain than might, at first sight, be expected. Experts are known to have claimed to be descendants of a particular expert. It would, however, probably be more realistic to see groups of experts as clans. Being a member of such a clan would imply a claim to knowledge passed on by the clan. Roman magistrate-experts and members of the *collegia* came from the same group of families but this could hardly have been otherwise: religious tasks were distributed among members of a relatively small number of elite families.[124] In Mesopotamia, the evidence of biological families is somewhat stronger: it is possible to discern a relatively large number of families of *ummanû*—but even so few real 'mantic families' can be attested and it is impossible to exclude that individuals were adopted into these families. The institutionalization of the practice made it difficult for individuals to falsely claim descent from a family because their deception would be found out.

The presence of Mesopotamian families of experts was reinforced by the education which was the prerequisite of the expert: as discussed on p. 104, the authority of Mesopotamian experts derived from scholarly instruction and learning. The best way to acquire this was

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[120] Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum*, vol. 3, 1422.

[121] Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 66–178; 189: in Liv. 29.38.7, for example, we find a report that Marcus Pomponius Matho had been *augur* and *decemvir* at the time of his death and must have held these offices simultaneously (in the same way that Quintus Fabius Maximus had been *augur* and *pontifex* at the time of his death: Liv. 30.26.7–10).

[122] And were reorganized under Claudius: Tac. *Ann*. 11.15. There is some evidence for families of *haruspices*, or at least for father-son relationships. But is unsure if these men were public or private *haruspices*. Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 193.

[123] MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43–59; Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 193–195; Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 180. Private haruspices could be father and son, it appears: L. Titinius L.f. Pelagianus Arnensis and L. Titinius Vitalis (Haack, *Prosopographie*, 114–115); L. Vibius Primus and [. Vibius] Primigenius (Haack, *Prosopographie*, 127–128); Quintus Fabius Maximus and Quintus Fabius Maximus (Liv. 30.26.7–10).

[124] Just one example of an individual who held high political functions and was an augur is Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (Liv. 23.30.15).

to be trained from an early age. Being born into a family of scholars or perhaps being adopted at a very early age would therefore seem to have been an essential condition. In Greece, a rather less demanding training was required (cf. p. 83), which also allowed a degree of flexibility about the age of a new clan member. A child could be introduced into the profession at a later stage or even commence its career on entering a clan as an adult. It could be argued that such a situation would have been practically unheard of in Mesopotamia on account of the educational demands made on the practitioner.

In short, in family status Roman and Mesopotamian experts scored 'high' on the relative socio-economic scale. Although they could have been adopted, they were recruited from families of known descent, which were members of the elite in Rome and were certainly not the poorest in Mesopotamia. The evidence suggests that, more than in the two other cultural areas, the Greek expert could have been born into any family before entering a divinatory 'family' or clan. Consequently, on the socio-economic scale he should here be classified as 'variable'.

Education

Generally speaking, the more educated an individual, the higher his or her position on the scale of socio-economic status. Some kind of education or training was required before a person could launch a career as a knowledgeable expert—unless an individual faked this knowledge. Although a Greek mythological expert could assert his expertise by claiming the gods had taught him the art and the mythical Melampos acquired his skills after snakes had licked his ears, in real life experts will have had to acquire the necessary skills in different ways—although Greek *manteis* might have claimed some degree of inspiration as well.[125]

It seems that there was no 'official education' for experts in Greece.[126] Therefore the training of the Greek expert must be a topic closely linked to his membership of a group of experts, his family or clan. If an expert was a member of such a group, he could be trained and taught by more

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[125] Flower, *The seer, passim*. For an expert claiming to have been thaught by the supernatural, e.g., Kett, *Prosopographie*, 38–39: Euenios (26). On Melampos' perceived source of knowledge see Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.11; see also Paus. 9.10.6.

[126] M. Griffith, 'Official and private in early Greek institutions of education' in: Y.L Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman antiquity* (Leiden 2001) 23–84, at 31–32.

senior members during an apprenticeship of some sort. If not, he would have had to train himself.

In effect, there were three ways in which aspiring experts could train themselves or be trained by other people: a) empirically, on the basis of experience and common sense; b) by the oral transmission of knowledge; or c) by studying a written source containing such knowledge.[127] Naturally these options were not mutually exclusive and, in theory, could all be used simultaneously. In Greece, the first two possibilities will certainly have been available, as perhaps the third as well, but it should be noted that written text played a small part in Greek divination (cf. pp. 167–168) and the only, possible, Greek self-taught expert attested in the sources is Thrasyllus, who inherited books from his guest-friend and maybe learnt the craft from these.[128] Nevertheless, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that this guest-friend had already taught Thrasyllos to divine during his own lifetime.[129]

Although apprenticeships are likely to have played an important part in the transfer of interpretative skills, a Greek expert needed to know both the appropriate form and the content to be able to practise his trade. Personality was crucial as the *mantis* needed to exude charisma and inspiration. Michael Flower states that learning how to employ charisma and to behave with the authority of an expert was one of the most important goals of the training an expert would have received.[130] Because of the lack of objective authority (for example, based on control of a body of texts, pp. 137–138) about the exact meaning of a sign, a Greek expert could improvise quite freely and flexibly, within socially accepted boundaries. His charisma would have helped him to test and stretch the boundaries—which could differ depending on time and place and, more specifically, on client expectations. Where would all these skills have been learned? Most probably in practice. Watching an expert at work allowed the expert-to-be to become acquainted with the more performative side of the divinatory ritual—whether this was in the context of an apprenticeship facilitated by some clan structure or on an individual basis.

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[127] A concise introduction to important literature on this topic can be found in M. Bloch, *How we think they think: anthropological approaches to cognition, memory and literacy* (Boulder, COL 1998) 7–11.

[128] Isoc. *Aegineticus* 5. What exactly the contents of these books were is unknown. R. Parker does not think they were guidelines for the interpretation of signs: Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 119 n. 4.

[129] Flower, 'The Iamidae', 190.

[130] Flower, *The seer, passim*.

Training was the first priority in the process of becoming a Mesopotamian expert.[131] It would commence with the basic scribal and literary arts, which would give the student the status of a *ṭupšarru* (scribe). He could then prepare to specialize in becoming a *bārû* or a *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*.

In Mesopotamia divination was thought of as a secret of the gods (*niṣirti bārûti*) and, at least in theory, known only to a select number of individuals belonging to particular families, usually employed by the palace, working in a relatively closed profession.[132] A prerequisite for becoming an astrologer or a *bārû* was extensive training in the scholarly literature:

> The learned savant, who guards the secrets of the great gods, will bind his son whom he loves with an oath before Šamaš and Adad by tablet and stylus and will instruct him.[133]

Traditionally, in Mesopotamia the son of a *bārû* was taught by his (adoptive) father. Wilfred G. Lambert argues that passing on the secrets of divination to chosen sons would ensure that there would be enough work for everyone (because this was a way to determine that only a restricted number of individuals were trained).[134] Astrologers would be educated by specialized teachers:

> [As] the king last year summoned [his scholars, he did not] summon me with [them], (so) I wrote to the palace: "The apprentices whom the king appointed in my charge have learned Enūma Anu Enlil; what is my fault that the king has not summoned me with his scholars?"[135]

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[131] For a brief introduction to the places were pupils were schooled see Van der Toorn, *Scribal culture*, 55–56.

[132] On the secrecy of divinatory knowledge (which has been contested by some) see further N. Veldhuis, 'The theory of knowledge and the practice of celestial divination' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 77–91, at 79–80; and much more extensively A. Lenzi, *Secrecy and the gods: secret knowledge in ancient Mesopotamia and biblical Israel* (Helsinki 2008) 1–220. For an example of experts at the palace at a particular time (of course not the only evidence of employment of experts by the palace) see SAA 7 1 i.1–8; ii.1–6; rev. 1.8–11 (astrologers, *bārû* and augurs respectively); SAA 7 7; rev.ii.7.

[133] Enmeduranki text: K 2487 + 3646 + 4364; K 3357 + 9941; K 13307, lines 19–22. Edition and translation (slightly adapted) W.G. Lambert, 'Enmeduranki and related matters', *JCS* 21 (1967) 126–138 at 132. ^{lú}UM.ME.A *mu-du-ú na-ṣir* AD.ḪAL DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ | *a-píl-šu ša i-ram-mu ina ṭup-pi u* GI-*dup-pi* | *ina ma-ḫar* ^{d}UTU *u* ^{d}IŠKUR *ú-tam-ma-šu-ma* | *ú-šaḫ-ḫa-su* [. . .].

[134] Lambert, 'Qualifications', 143.

[135] SAA 10 171 4–12. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. *šad-da-qàd* [x x x x x] | LUGAL SAG ^{LÚ}[*um-ma-ni-šú*] ⌜*i* ⌝-*šú-ú* | LUGAL *it-ti-*⌜*š* ⌝-[*nu* SAG-*a ul*] ⌜*i* ⌝-*ši* | *a-na* É.GAL ⌜*al*⌝-

The study of both theory and written texts was the most important part of the expert's training, although it seems reasonable to suppose that he also learned such behavioural skills as how to deal with clients and how to win their confidence (although this was more of an issue for the Greek than the Mesopotamian expert). How long will this training have taken?[136] No attempt to answer this question can be made without making a number of assumptions. My first assumption is that in the Neo-Assyrian Empire the average age of death of a male child after it reached the age of five was 43.47 years.[137] Other assumptions are that an expert worked at the palace until his death,[138] for an average of 8.08 years and his education commenced between the ages of five and fifteen. The average lifespan minus the years spent working for the palace minus the first five to fifteen years of life equals the number of years spent in training and as a junior expert. If training began at the age of five, the sum is 43.47 – 8.08 – 5 = 30.39. If the

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tap-ra | *um-ma* ^{LÚ}ŠAMÁN.MÁL.LÁ.MEŠ | *šá* LUGAL *ina pa-ni-ía ip'-qí-du'* | DIŠ UD!—AN—^{d}EN.LÍL *il-ta-an-du* | *um-ma mi-nu-ú ḫi-ṭu-ú-a* | LUGAL *it-ti* ^{LÚ}*um-ma-ni-šú*.

[136] There are no clues to the existence of an initiation, which would have been helpful here. See also Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 455.

[137] 38.47 is the average life expectancy, according to the Princeton Regional Model Life Tables (A.J. Coale, P. Demeny & B. Vaughan, *Regional model life tables and stable populations* (New York 1983^2)—West mortality level 4, maximum natural growth rate 0,5 percent), of a child who had reached his fifth birthday. This is the level and growth rate which is usually used for the ancient world, although M.H. Hansen pleads for a lower growth rate as, for example, used by W. Scheidel: between 0.25 and 0.45 percent. See M.H. Hansen, *The shotgun method: the demography of the ancient Greek city-state culture* (Columbia, MO 2006) 55 n. 96. However, if the growth rate is lower, the life expectancy of those over 5 years old is higher. Consequently, taking 0.5 percent as growth rate in this instance means taking the cautious approach. By using the life expectancy of a 5-year-old, I have cancelled out the high mortality rate of children under 5, inclusion of which would bring down life expectancy considerably. This is possible because I have assumed that education did not commence before the age of 5. In fact at what age children would begin to receive an education is unknown. A text commonly referred to as 'Examtext A' obv. 4 (= Rm 148; VAT 10502; VAT 7853; K 10125; VAT 10382 = Kar 111) indicates that first education of the scribe began during childhood, not specifying the age: U_4.TUR.RA.ZU.TA NAM.ŠUL.LA.A.ZU.[ŠÈ] É.DUB.BA.A Ì.TI.LE.EN (= *ul-tu* u_4*-um ṣe-ḫe-ri-ka a-di meṭ-lu-t*[*i-ka*] *ina bīt tuppi áš-bat*): 'Von Kindheid an, bis du ein reifer Mann wurdest, saßest du im Tafelhause'. Translation and edition: A.W. Sjöberg, 'Der Examentext A', *ZA* 64 (1974) 137–176, at 140–141. Cf. P.D. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Münster 2001) 219. Duration of the training for various crafts is known from sources from the Late Babylonian period, but not for that of divinatory experts or other *ummānû* who had to be literate to practise their profession: H.P.H. Petschow, 'Lehrverträge', *RlA* 6 (1980–1983) 556–570, at 557–558. To give an indication: 5 years for weaving, 6 years for woodwork, 8 years for construction work. These appear to be relatively long periods of training/apprenticeship. J. Hackl, 'Neue spätbabylonische Lehrverträge aus dem British Museum und der Yale Babylonian Collection', *AfO* 52 (2013) 77–97 appeared too late to be included here.

[138] Unless he had fallen into disgrace or perhaps became infirm: blindness, deafness and so on might have rendered the expert unfit for his profession.

age of fifteen is adhered to, the outcome would be 20.39. This would mean that, on average, roughly twenty to thirty years were spent in preparation for working at the court. No division can be made between the period of education and of first work experience: if there was employment at the palace gate or as a district expert, as in Old Babylonian times, this is included in the period of preparation. Even with this caveat, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that a Neo-Assyrian expert needed both rigorous training and experience before he was employed by the king.

There are only snippets of information about the Roman experts and these relate to those who worked in a public, official, context: for example, "in the days of the forefathers" the Senate prepared a decree to the effect that a number of young boys were to be sent to Etruria to learn their craft from Etruscan *haruspices*.[139] Perhaps this would have entailed some sort of selection and schooling of young boys so that they could learn skills they could later use to serve Rome (or transmit to their successors). There is no certainty about whether this was an incidental measure or whether it was a regular occurence—sources are lacking. Some think the education of public *haruspices* took the form of oral instruction—but this, too, remains a mystery.[140] It seems sure, however, that those belonging to the *collegia* (*decemviri* and *augures*) did not need pre-existing knowledge but learned their crafts from their senior colleagues.[141]

The Mesopotamian craft of divination was taught on a more theoretical and textual basis than was the case in Greece. The idea that only individuals from particular families were taught ties in with the Mesopotamian belief that divination was the secret of the gods. It follows that divination in Mesopotamia was the preserve of a privileged and close-knit group. The same can be said about public divination in Rome, which was also based—although to a lesser degree—on written texts and traditions, only accessible to a select group—but for a different reason: as an inheritance of old structures of political power. In Greece, there is little evidence of the need to undertake extensive scholarly training to understand the workings of divination.[142] Instead, it is possible to deduct more emphasis on the acquisition of behavioural skills. Practical apprenticeships were used for this purpose.

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[139] Cic. *Div*. 1.41.92; Val. Max. 1.1.

[140] Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 192–195.

[141] Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum*, vol. 3, 1422.

[142] Artemidoros does claim that knowledge of other dream books makes him a better interpreter of dreams.

With respect to their education Mesopotamian experts should be regarded as having been in the 'high' category; Roman experts score 'low' on education as they did not receive formal training (however, the Roman experts were an elite-group in other ways—for example, with respect to non-divinatory education, Roman experts were among the most learned of all experts); and Greek experts fell into the 'middle' category, because the Greek way of training by experience was obviously less systematic, theoretical, extensive and prestigious than that of their counterparts in Mesopotamia but more extensive than can be argued for Rome.

Occupation

The experts' employment, their loyalty to their clients, their hierarchical relationships, not to mention competition and co-operation, are factors which help to determine the level of socio-economic status in the category of 'occupation'.

Institutionalization and Mobility

The divinatory work of Mesopotamian experts was relatively institutionalized. It was performed on behalf of the king and it was usual for experts to be posted to one place (although they might be moved). Therefore, their employment was relatively secure as long as they maintained good relations with the king by guarding him against potential dangers. Roman experts were semi-institutionalized, working in their *collegia* on a part-time basis. In Greece, many experts travelled from place to place and were not employed in the framework of an institution.[143] Nevertheless, more than once such an expert would begin as an itinerant but later settle somewhere or find more-or-less regular employment. Similar conditions might also have applied to private Roman experts: some army leaders are known to have employed experts privately (see p. 102).

The majority of Greek experts, who did not settle, do not seem to have enjoyed a good reputation, at least for some of them this was certainly the case: the fact that Thrasyllos was an itinerant expert of divination was

[143] E.g., Hom. *Od.* 17.380–386; working in the marketplace see Soph. *OT* 19–21; Ath. 13.605cd. For chresmologues knocking on doors of rich men seeking employment (admittedly not *manteis*, but the story still illustrates the circumstances with which wandering *manteis* might have had to cope) see Pl. *Resp*. 364b.

used in a lawsuit to impugn his character. Yet, despite such reputations, itinerant experts were used all the time:

> Thrasyllus, the father of the testator, had inherited nothing from his parents; but having become the guest-friend of Polemaenetus, the soothsayer, he became so intimate with him that Polemaenetus at his death left to him his books on divination and gave him a portion of the property which is now in question. Thrasyllus, with these books as his capital, practised the art of divination. He became an itinerant soothsayer, lived in many cities, and was intimate with several women, some of whom had children whom he never even recognised as legitimate, and, in particular, during this period he lived with the mother of the complainant.[144]

As noted, some members of the affluent Greek elite would also employ an expert for a longer period of time.[145] When there was a regular need of an expert, one important benefit accruing from using the same expert thrusts itself forward. His good track records allied with his proven discretion towards his employer were apparently such a reassurance that clients would prefer a regular expert. In Greece, semi-regular employment could be found by working for a commander in the army, at sanctuaries and, in later Hellenistic times, for the Greek *polis*.[146] Compared to the situations in Mesopotamia and Rome this is still a relatively non-institutionalized setting.

Employment

In Rome, experts worked on a part-time basis. Magistrates with divinatory duties had many other tasks to fulfil: of the *augures* and *decemviri*, a significant number simultaneously held other magisterial offices.[147] So far it has not been possible to discover whether private divinatory experts

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[144] See also how Hdt. 9.95 speaks negatively of a wandering expert. Isoc. *Aegineticus* 5–6. Translation G. Norlin. Edition: Teubner. Θράσυλλος γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ καταλιπόντος τὴν διαθήκην παρὰ μὲν τῶν προγόνων οὐδεμίαν οὐσίαν παρέλαβε, ξένος δὲ Πολεμαινέτῳ μάντει γενόμενος οὕτως οἰκείως διετέθη πρὸς αὐτόν, ὥστ' ἀποθνήσκων ἐκεῖνος τάς τε βίβλους τὰς περὶ τῆς μαντικῆς αὐτῷ κατέλιπε καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μέρος τι τῆς νῦν οὔσης ἔδωκεν. Λαβὼν δὲ Θράσυλλος ταύτας ἀφορμὰς ἐχρῆτο τῇ τέχνῃ· πλάνης δὲ γενόμενος καὶ διαιτηθεὶς ἐν πολλαῖς πόλεσιν ἄλλαις τε γυναιξὶ συνεγένετο, ὧν ἔνιαι καὶ παιδάρι' ἀπέδειξαν ἀκεῖνος οὐδὲ πώποτε γνήσι' ἐνόμισε, καὶ δὴ καὶ τὴν ταύτης μητέρ' ἐν τούτοις τοῖς χρόνοις ἔλαβεν.

[145] See pp. 91–92.

[146] See for an example of the *mantis* in the army: *SEG* 29 361 i.4. Nevertheless, the *mantis* always hovered in the 'messy margins' of *polis* religion, according to J.N. Bremmer, '*Manteis*, magic, mysteries and mythography: the messy margins of *polis* religion?', *Kernos* 23 (2010) 13–25, at 14–16—and I agree with him.

[147] Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 173–174.

worked in other professions apart from divination in Rome—their situation was probably comparable to that of Greek *manteis*.

Other activities were not excluded in Mesopotamia: Bēl-aplu-iddina combined his activities in the field of extispicy with being a commanding officer.[148] A *bārû* could also be a landowner as well as a money-lender.[149] This variety of activities is quite remarkable, because the Mesopotamian astrologer and *bārû* worked under institutionalized conditions—which meant that they would also have administrative and practical duties.[150] The Mesopotamian astrologers (although probably not all of them—those who were high up in the internal hierarchy were probably exempted) taught astrology and undertook both corvée and the *ilku* duty (a compulsory 'civil service').[151]

> May Nabû and Marduk bless the king. Because of the *ilku*-duty and the corvée work we cannot keep the watch of the king, and the pupils do not learn the scribal craft.[152]

Apparently there was some room for other activities of both a prestigious and a rather less prestigious nature such as the corvée obligations. These experts even complained about having to perform too many tasks. Performance of menial tasks was perhaps the price they had to pay for their otherwise relatively safe institutional environment and their position in the relationship of patronage with the king.

In Greece, with its relative lack of institutionalization, there is plenty of evidence for divinatory experts taking on other tasks or activities: the Greek expert Agesias, son of Sostratos, who lived in Syracuse in the first half of the fifth century, won a victory in the mule races at the Olympic Games, probably in 468.[153] Astulos even won three times at the Olympic Games. Another is Antifon, who also lived in the fifth century, who was

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[148] A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian rulers of the early first millennium BC I* (*1114–859 BC*) (Toronto 1991) A.0.101.1. iii 20.

[149] Like Nabû-aḫu-riba, *bārû* and landowner: SAA 14 271; like Marduk-šumu-uṣur: SAA 10 153 6–16; and an unknown in SAA 6 12 2.

[150] SAA 10 96 1-b.e. 25; SAA 10 102 8–12.

[151] SAA 10 143. See for general introductions on the *ilku*-duty: B. Kienast, 'Ilku', *RlA* 5 (1976) 52–59; J.N. Postgate, 'Royal ideology and state administration in Sumer and Akkad' in: J. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East* vol. 1 (1995) 395–411, at 406–407.

[152] SAA 10 143 rev. 1–8. Edition and translation S. Parpola. On the *ilku*-duty cf. the previous note. ^{d}AG *u* ^{d}AMAR.UTU | *a-na* LUGAL *lik-ru-bu* | TA* *pa-an il-ki* | *tup-šik-ki ma-ṣar-tu* | *ša* LUGAL *la ni-na-ṣar* | ^{LÚ}*di-da-bé-e | ⌜*ṭup*⌝-[*šar*]-⌜*ru*⌝-*tu* | *la* [*i*]-⌜*lam*⌝-*mu-du*.

[153] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 18–20: (H)Agesias (2); Pind. *Ol.* 6. See on (H)Agesias: N. Luraghi, 'Un mantis eleo nella Siracusa di Ierone: Agesia di Siracusa, Iamide di Stinfalo', *Klio* 79 (1997) 69–86.

called a *teratoskopos* and *oneirokrites*, but was also a poet and a philosopher. He probably wrote the lost treatise about divination by means of dreams.[154] Lampon was an expert, but a powerful politician too.[155] There are also a number of attestations of experts who fought in the army, the most famous of whom must be Kleoboulos who died in 370 and is lauded both as *mantis* and warrior in his funerary inscription.[156] All these activities are examples of accomplishments which might have been expected of an educated Greek male individual—the Greek sources only relate the prestigious activities which experts might undertake of their own accord (it seems plausible that Greek experts did not record other, less prestigious jobs they needed to do to survive).

Loyalties

How did the different terms of employment influence the loyalty of experts? It must have made a difference whether an expert was working in an institutionalized context or not.

Roman public experts only had one 'employer': the Senate. Their task was to help the Republic to function and their activities were narrowly defined. Because Roman experts were also members of the governing elite, there was a certain risk that they might feather their own nests as far as this was possible.[157] Even if manipulation of signs or their interpretation was common, not much can be said about a sense of loyalty to

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[154] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 23: Antifon (9).

[155] See on Lampon, e.g., Bremmer, 'Prophets, seers, and politics', 157.

[156] *SEG* 16 (1959) 193. See for another *mantis* who died in battle (Megistias) Hdt. 7.228; and for a *mantis* who furnished the army with a strategy see Hdt. 8.27.3. A *mantis* could have both a military and strategic role—see Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 56–60; see 92–138 for an overview of signs in a military context; see also the discussion in R. Lonis, *Guerre et religion en Grèce à l'époque classique: recherches sur les rites, les dieux, l'idéologie de la victoire* (Paris 1979) 43–115.

[157] However, I think it impossible for Roman divination to have existed in the way it did if it had been a mere going-through-the-motions which could be manipulated for personal gain. Yet, on scepticism see among others for Greece: Mikalson, *Honor thy gods*, 87–114; Flower, *The seer*, 132–152. In Rome: V. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter: das Prodigienwesen der römischen Republik* (Stuttgart 1998) 71–78; or on a more textual level studies such as K.J. Dover, 'Thucydides on oracles' in: idem, *The Greeks and their legacy: collected papers* vol. 2 (London 1987–1988) 65–73. The most famous example of a Roman treatise in which divination is criticized is Cicero's *De divinatione* (although these are not necessarily Cicero's own opinion). Anthropological perspectives are offered by C.R. Whittaker, 'The Delphic oracle: belief and behavior in ancient Greece—and Africa', *HThR* 58 (1965) 21–47, especially 45–47; Park, 'Social contexts', 195–209; W. Bascom, *Ifa divination: communication between gods and men in West Africa* (Bloomington, IND 1969) 119.

the Republic—only about the methods of self-advancement within the system of the Republic.

Mesopotamian experts had one employer and he should not be betrayed.[158] There is a letter to the king from an expert saying conspirators had forced him, the expert, to perform divination. The expert duly wrote to the king to tell him he had been tricked into this punishable offence—his job was to protect the king, not to work for others and he was afraid that the king would find out. He wrote to the king to reassure him that he himself was still loyal, mollifying the king with the thought that perhaps the extispicy had not revealed the enemy the truth:

> […] "You are an expert in divination?" (Break) He made me *love* him […] "I'll tell you this: [*the king*] has *provi*[*ded* for m]e, until *in anger he placed* (*me*) *in your service*." "Go and perform the (following) divination before Šamaš: 'Will the chief eunuch take over the kingship?" […] [By the gods of the king], my [lord]: The extispicy [which I performed was] but a colossal fraud! (The only thing) [I was th]inking of (was), "May he not kill me."[159]

Mesopotamian ties of loyalty were clearly defined and are part of the relationship of patronage discussed above.

In Greece matters are less clear. Wandering Greek experts could begin working for one Greek army and, for some reason, switch to the opposing party or even to another nation like the Persians. Hegesistratos, for example, worked for the Spartans who were dissatisfied with him and put him in prison. Obviously desperate to escape, Hegesistratos managed to free himself by cutting off his foot, after which he began working for the Persians and was their *mantis* at the Battle of Plataea.[160] Hippomarchos, too, worked (indirectly) for the Persians: he was the *mantis* of the Greeks in the Persian army.[161] Another example of an expert who was paid to work by various parties is Silanos who lived around 400 BC. He was a *mantis* of unknown descent who came from Ambrakia. He was able to inspect *exta*

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[158] And the king could claim experts for himself: SAA 18 131 22-rev. 9.

[159] SAA 10 179 22-rev. 5; 19–21. Edition and translation (the italicized words in the translation are uncertain): S. Parpola. […] *um-ma* ^{LÚ}ḪAL-ʳ*u*ʾ-[*tu*] ʳ*ta*!- *le*!-ʾ*e*!ʾ -*e*! […] | *ú-šar*!-*im-man*-ʳ*ni* xʾ [x x x x x x x x] | *ši-i a-qab-bak*-ʳ*ka*ʾ [*um-ma* LUGAL] *in-du*-[*na-an*]-ʳ*niʾ* | *a-di ina lib-bat a-na* ʳ*paʾ*-[*ni*]-*ka ú-še*-[*zi*]-ʳ*zuʾ* | *um-ma a-lik-ma* ^{LÚ}ḪAL-*ú-ti a-na tar*!-*ṣi* ^{d}UTU | *bi-ri* GAL.LÚ.SAG LUGAL-*ú-tú i-na-áš-ši-i* | […] | [DINGIR.MEŠ *šá* LUGAL *be-lí*]-*ía ki-i* ^{LÚ}ḪAL-*ú-tu* | [*šá i-pu-šu*] *al-la šá-a-ru me-ḫu-u* | [*šu-ú* TA ŠÀ-*bi-ia a*]-*dab-bu-ub um-ma la* (*i*)-*du-kan-ni*.

[160] Hdt. 9.37.1; 9.38.1; 9.41.4. See on another Elean seer being saved (and probably put to work for Dareios): Hdt. 3.132.2.

[161] Hdt. 9.83.2.

and became the expert of Cyrus the Younger when the latter went to fight his brother Artaxerxes III. After Cyrus had been defeated, he worked as an expert in the army of Xenophon (but ran away).[162] Apparently it was possible to change employer for personal reasons or when circumstances dictated. It should be noted that ethnicity was not a decisive factor in changing employers. Moreover, it appears Greek experts could also face dismissal: Periallos, a Greek expert, is one of the few experts who is known to have been given the sack because of misconduct.[163] Where divination was not institutionalized, loyalty in the strict sense of the word—working for one employer for a very long time and keeping his best interest at heart—does not seem to have been the rule. The situation at institutionalized oracles and sanctuaries where a *mantis* could work for a longer time was probably different. Loyalty and the degree of structural and institutionalized employment go hand in hand. A Mesopotamian expert would have been expected to be loyal on account of the obligations imposed by the patron-client relationship. A Roman expert might have had conflicting interests, because he was both an expert and a member of the political elite, and needed to integrate the two roles.

Hierarchy

Little is known about a hierarchy among Roman experts, although it can be presumed that those who were perceived to be the best (private) *haruspices* would have been employed by the highest-ranking individuals in society. Among the Etruscan *haruspices*, there appears to have been a *summus haruspex*.[164] In Greece some experts were deemed more important than others. In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon mentions a number of *manteis* by name although there were many more in his army.[165] Might these

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[162] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 69–70: Silanos (62). For references (from Kett) see Xen. *An*. 1.7.18; 5.6.16; 6.4.13; 5.6.28–34; 6.4.13; 5.6.16–18; Ael. *NA* 8.5; Philostr. *VA* 8.7.43.

[163] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 66: Periallos (58). See Hdt. 6.66.2 (from Kett).

[164] It has been speculated that this *summus haruspex* was the head (and perhaps most senior member) of the *ordo LX haruspicum*. The famous Spurinna was perhaps a *summus haruspex*: Val. Max. 1.6.13. Cic. *Div*. 1.52; Suet. *Iul*. 81. See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 110–112, where further references can be found. Cf. Rawson, 'The *Disciplina Etrusca*', 143–145; the oldest of the *haruspices* speaks: Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus*, 545; 548. See also the epitaph of the *haruspex maximus* (*CIL* VI 2164 = *ILS* 4951, see Haack, *Prosopographie*, 119–120, in which there are further references) and that of T. Flavius Clodianus, the 'magister har(us)p(icum) de LX' (*CIL* XIV 164. See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 49, where there are further references). The question still remains of whether one would consider the fact that an *ordo* had a head to be an indication of an internal hierarchy.

[165] Xen. *An*. 6.4.15.

named experts have been the more important ones?[166] At sanctuaries where *manteis* were employed to examine the sacrificial animals, they had a leader, the *mantiarchos*.[167]

In Mesopotamia, sources from the Old Babylonian period give us an indication of a possible hierarchy and career path within the *bārû* profession:

> [the newly trained *bārû*] might then live and work in a team headed by either a *waklum*, 'overexpert', or a *šāpirum*, 'chief'. As a professional there was a career ladder for the expert to climb; this might be reconstructed as follows: the first practice could be at the palace gate where he could offer his services for a fee. [...] Perhaps in return for having a space at the palace gate, the expert was expected to perform miscellaneous duties to the palace. The Old Babylonian extispicy reports deal almost exclusively with the experts' service to private individuals. As a next step, in the royal employ, the expert could become attached to an army garrison. There is evidence to suggest that one or more experts accompanied a campaigning army and there are references to a *bārûm* walking in front. Before entering royal service, it is very likely that the expert himself became the object of extispicy as a form of vetting.[168]

The *bārû* attached to a military unit can be—tentatively—identified in Neo-Assyrian times, for example, by his depiction on Assurbanipal's relief from Nimrud.[169] Possibly, like his Old Babylonian counterpart, the Neo-Assyrian *bārû*, after having served in the army could become a 'district expert' and finally a court expert. Although the facts about this in Neo-Assyrian times are still very uncertain, what has been established is that there was an 'elite' among the divinatory experts in the palace and also one in which those in proximity of the king were higher up in the rankings than those posted in cities further away. Ranking is also attested by titles

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[166] Later in time, there also seems to have been a ranking among dream experts, at least according to Artemidoros: those who had a 'scholarly' background were, in his opinion, higher up in the hierarchy than those working in the marketplace. D. Harris-McCoy, 'Artemidorus' self-presentation in the preface to the Oneirocritica', *CJ* 106 (2011) 423–444, at 431; 426.

[167] L. Robert, 'Sur un Apollon oraculaire à Chypre', *CRAI* (1978) 338–344, at 342 (= *SEG* 28 1299. See *SEG* 30 1608 for references to other opinions). Cf. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 2, 392.

[168] Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy*, 15–16.

[169] Although the individual on British Museum WA 124548 has also been designated a butcher: D. Collon, 'Depictions of priests and priestesses in the ancient Near East' in: K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and officials in the ancient Near East: papers of the second colloquium on the ancient Near East, the city and its life, held at the Middle Eastern culture centre in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 22–24, 1996* (Heidelberg 1999) 17–46, at 24 and figure 33.

of individuals: there was, for example, a 'chief *bārû*'[170] and a study of titles reveals that a man could become 'chief scribe' after having been 'deputy-chief scribe'.[171] Another possible clue is provided by the way the names were listed in reports and letters. In the reign of Esarhaddon, one Marduk-šākin-šumi was listed below Adad-šumu-uṣur, but this order was reversed later under Assurbanipal.[172] If this indicates an estimation of importance among peers, it shows that this eminence could fluctuate. However, this idea is contested.[173] Another indication that not every expert was equal is a letter from an astrologer who has been appointed to teach the crown prince and shows his gratitude to the king for his selection; and there are also letters thanking the king because an astrologer has been permitted to join the king's entourage.[174] These must have been 'promotions'. Therefore, the most substantial evidence for a hierarchy among experts comes from Mesopotamia and this is not unexpected: hierarchy is a logical corollary of institutionalization.

Competition and Co-Operation

Were the relationships among the various types of experts co-operative or competitive (or both)? Mesopotamian experts regularly co-operated. In the reports to the king, some *bārû* wrote how they performed extispicies together. It also appears that Mesopotamian *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*, but not *bārû*, worked with people from outside their own circle.[175] For example, the astrologers Nabû-aḫḫē-eriba and Balasî co-operated when they wrote joint letters to the king about eye-stones for the statue of the god, beseeching the king to give up fasting and eat, advising him to undertake a journey at a specific time, about conjunctions of Mars and Saturn, favourable days for the prince to visit his father and giving a reply to a

[170] For an example see, e.g., [Mar]duk-šumu-uṣur ([^{md}AMAR].UTU.MU.PAB LÚ.GAL ḪAL). SAA 7 7 rev. ii 7; see also SAA 10 182 5–9.

[171] See Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars*, vol. 2a, 467–470 (Appendix O). See also Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 608.

[172] Note that these two scholars are exorcists: Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars*, vol. 2a, 113; 152.

[173] Some argue the way names were listed was not systematic: Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 608.

[174] SAA 10 68. This has also been referred to as the 'inner circle' of experts (Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 68).

[175] See for a lack of co-operation with other groups Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 610.

question posed by the king.[176] Since their colleagues did the same, the result was a network of advice and discussion.

However, where there is co-operation there can also be competition: different experts could provide different or divergent interpretations of a particular sign, each claiming his to be the best.[177] Disputes and discussions could arise. The astrologer Balasî reports that:

> Concerning Mercury, about which the king my lord wrote to me: yesterday Issar-šumu-ereš had an argument with Nabû-ahhe-eriba in the palace. Later, at night, they went and all made observations; they saw (it) and were satisfied.[178]

Texts such as these suggest that each expert attempted to provide the most accurate interpretation—to be 'proven' later in time—, and that experts competed in this way.[179] Once again, it is institutionalization which paved the way for both co-operation and competition.

Without institutionalization, collaborations would have remained incidental. It is remarkable how little Greek evidence can be found regarding co-operation of *manteis*. Unquestionably, during military expeditions when more than one expert was available, some evidence of co-operation emerges. Xenophon's experts, like those of Alexander the Great for example, seem to have functioned as a team at times—although in Xenophon's case the evidence is not water-tight.[180] The only time in the *Anabasis* where co-operation is certainly mentioned is when all experts are called together to be witness to the signs. This occurred when the army was in dire straits: there was no food left but the signs in the exta continued to be negative so the army could not move on. The experts were called together so that all of them could witness and confirm this. Nevertheless, such occasions are the exceptions in the sources. Usually just one expert, not a group, is specifically mentioned.

Competition must have been rife in Greek and private Roman divination. The chief priority of experts who were not structurally employed

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[176] SAA 10 41; SAA 10 40; SAA 10 43; SAA 10 44; SAA 10 47; SAA 10 50; SAA 10 53; SAA 10 62.

[177] Arr. *Anab*. 1.11.2.

[178] SAA 8 83 4—rev. 3. Edition and translation: H. Hunger. *ina* UGU ˹MUL˺.UDU.IDIM.GUD.UD | *ša* LUGAL *be-lí iš-pur-an-ni* | *it-ti-ma-li* ^{md}15—MU—APIN-eš | *ina* ŠÀ É.GAL *ṣa-a-su* | *a-na* ^{md}PA—PAB.MEŠ—SU *ig-di-ri* | *i-da-a-ti ina nu-bat-ti* | *it-ta-al-ku gab-bi-šú-nu it-ta-aṣ-ru* | *e-ta-am-ru ib-tu-šu*. See for similar examples of competition and showing that one's interpretation was best: SAA 10 51; SAA 10 52 6–9; SAA 10 60; SAA 10 72.

[179] See for more examples Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 64.

[180] E.g., Arr. *Anab*. 4.15.7–8; Arr. *Anab*. 7.11.8–9; Xen. *An*. 6.4.15; 6.4.20.

was to attract clients. They could do this by means of word of mouth or by textual advertisments such as the owl statuette with a (Greek) inscription on the base advertising an expert from Rome—probably from the first century AD—now in the Museum of Antiquities at Leiden.[181] This owl has been thought to have belonged to a divinatory practice where he stood outside to attract clients. It has also been argued that Lysimachos, a fourth-century Greek expert who owned a tablet or writing table (*pinakion oneirokritikon*), used this to advertise his business.[182] However, what this *pinakion oneirokritikon* actually was is far from certain—it might have been a written textual guideline to interpreting signs. It should be noted that the 'freelance' experts were not the only ones who needed to stand out. Oracles would also need to win clients: Alexandros of Abonouteichos advertised his business at the oracle site. In Lucian's satire, he is depicted as having sent people around to spread the word about his oracle.[183] In short, from the Greek and Roman materials, it appears that experts working for themselves needed a commercial pitch or presentation.

There is little explicit evidence of competitive confrontations with the exception of the story about Mopsos and Kalchas competing to be the best expert. When Kalchas did not manage to win the 'competition', he died of grief.[184] For Rome the famous saying by Cato, as quoted by Cicero, might be considered. One (private) *haruspex* was thought to have been laughing at the other when they met each other in the street. Interpretations of

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[181] F.L. Bastet & H. Brunsting, *Corpus signorum classicorum musei antiquarii lugduno-batavi = Catalogus van het klassieke beeldhouwwerk in het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 2 vols (Zutphen 1982) number 118 (no museum number mentioned). According to the museum website (http://www.rmo.nl/collectie/-topstukken-), the inventory number is ZM-7 (B434 is also mentioned). What the exact meaning of the inscription (*IG* 14.130* = *CIG* IV 6848) is disputed but the text should, according to L.J.F. Janssen (*Musei Lugduno-Batavi Inscriptiones Graecae et Latinae* (Leiden 1842) 61), be read as: [Ἀ]ρχάτης Πέτριος, ὁ μάντις, μαντεο ἀετ(ὸν) Δ. ἀσσαρίων (ἀνέθηκε). Note that this owl was once thought to be a fake (in *IG*). However, this is not argued in *CIG*, Janssen or Bastet. It is not a unique piece: B.H. Stricker, 'De heilige uil', *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* n.s. 37 (1957) 1–14. Another such advertisement (but for an individual interpreting dreams) is known from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Guarducci, *Epigrafia*, vol. 4, 117–119.

[182] Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 27.3.

[183] Lucian *Alex*. 24. Although this source cannot be taken at face value to reveal historical facts or even be taken to indicate anything about a historical reality (as A. Bendlin argues: 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Mantik: Orakel im Medium von Handlung und Literatur in der Zeit der Zweiten Sophistik' in: D. Elm von der Osten, J. Rüpke & K. Waldner (eds), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart 2006) 159–208, at 202), it still reflects ideas about the possibility, at least theoretically, for someone to send people around to spread the word about an oracle.

[184] Apollod. *Ep*. 6.2–4.

this passage could be that it arose from competition, scepticism or both.[185] Some scholars have claimed that Roman *collegia* were in competition with other groups—especially the *haruspices* and *decemviri*—, chiefly for political purposes, but this cannot be demonstrated convincingly. What can be shown is that the Senate would sometimes ask the various bodies of experts to give their individual opinions about the same signs.[186]

Worries about Reliability

If an individual divined for himself, he had only his own lack of expertise to blame if it seemed he had it wrong. He would probably keep his 'failings' quiet and try again the next time around. However, if an individual consulted an expert, the dynamics of the divinatory process were completely different. When an expert seemed to have been wrong, at least in the eye of the beholder, this was far worse than a layman's mistake: after all, the expert was by definition someone who had the ability to get it right. Using an expert was of course reassuring for the client (he received an authoritative interpretation), but it was not without problems.[187] An expert should have had more knowledge than the layman himself, but did he really have the skills and could he be trusted? The expert might be prompted by hidden motives, such as pecunerary concerns, which would lead him to tell his client what he wanted to hear. Perhaps a particular interpretation was to the expert's own advantage. All these fears which could beset the individual are illustrated in many literary sources. Jokes at the expense of the expert can regularly be observed. It appears that, "by the latter half of the fifth century BC *mantis* could in comic context be used as a byword for certain forms of fraud [. . .]."[188] Experts were thought to be lusting after money and political power: twisting the signs from the supernatural would be a good way to attain what they wanted. Sophokles' *dramatis personae* illustrate this in two tragedies: in *Antigone* it is claimed that experts are in it for gain and in *Oidipous Tyrannos* Teiresias is depicted as a divinatory fraud who is out to make a profit. He is also

185 Cato *apud* Cic. *Div*. 2.24.

186 Or at least they were both consulted about the same sign and they agreed on its meaning in Cic. *Div*. 1.43.97. Cf. MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 57–59; Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 180–182; Liv. 42.20.2.

187 As is reflected in many sources, for example, in Herodotos: Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 107–109; 127–131.

188 Garland, 'Priests and power', 84. This also appears to be the way a later source such as Plutarch thinks about *manteis* and related experts (Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or.* 407c).

accused of playing political games in a bid to gain power. These two factors are also discussed in Lucian's *Alexandros*.[189] What should be noted is that all of these examples are literary representations of what must have been a widely felt concern: was the expert reliable? Nevertheless, the literary representations might be misleading: perhaps incompetence was a less pressing concern in Greece because—also in an emic sense—there was no mantic orthodoxy. How could an expert be wrong or rather, be proven wrong?

Suspicions of unreliability and incompetence affected the Mesopotamian expert—however, ideas about this were inextricably connected to ideas about loyalty. A literary example (which, again, may have reflected some kind of idea or fear on this topic) is the text known as the *Sin of Sargon*. The fact that Sennacherib separates the experts into groups indicates that he harboured suspicions, lest they talk to one another and influence the outcome of the extispicy (no motives why they should do this are given, although these can be speculated on):

> I w[ent and collected the haruspices], the courtiers of my palace guarding the mystery of god and king; I split them [into several groups] so that they could not ap[proach or speak to one another]. I [investigated] the sins of Sargon, my father, by extispicy, [enquiring of Šamaš and Adad] as follows: "Was it because [he esteemed] the gods o[f Assyria too much], […] The haruspices whom [I had split] into [several groups un]animously [gave me a reliable answer in the affirmative]."[190]

Additionally, there are attestations of *bārû* and astrologers who did not report negative signs to the king.[191] Still, this does not amount to much and we know little about attitudes toward private experts.

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[189] Soph. *Ant*. 1035–1039; Soph. *OT* 95–145; Soph. *OT* 605–610; See also Eur. *IA* 520; Eur. *Bacch*. 255–257; Eur. *IA* 955–958. Cf. on Teiresias in literary sources more generally G. Ugolini, *Untersuchungen zur Figur des Sehers Teiresias* (Tübingen 1995). Lucian *Alex*. *passim*; for some secondary literature on the subject see D. Elm von der Osten, 'Die Inszenierung des Betruges und seiner Entlarvung: Divination und ihre Kritiker in Lukians Schrift "Alexander oder der Lügenprophet" ' in: D. Elm von der Osten, J. Rüpke & K. Waldner (eds), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart 2006) 141–157.

[190] SAA 3 33 13–17; 21–22. Edition and translation: A. Livingstone. *u pag-ri it-ti* DINGIR *lu-še-e-ṣi al-*[*lik-ma ú-paḫ-ḫir* DUMU.MEŠ ^{LÚ}ḪAL.MEŠ] | *na-ṣir pi-riš-ti* DINGIR *u* LUGAL *man-za-*[*az* É.GAL-*ia a-na* 3-*šú a-na* 4-*ú*] | *a-zu-us-su-nu-ti-ma la iṭ-*[*ḫu-ú-ma la id-bu-bu it-ti a-ḫa-meš*] | *ḫi-ṭa-a-ti* ^{m}LUGAL—GIN AD-*ia ina* ⌜*bı*⌝-[*ri ab-re-e-ma* ^{d}UTU *u* ^{d}IM *áš-*'*a-al*] | *um-ma a-na* UGU *šá* DINGIR-MEŠ ⌜*š* ⌝ [KUR—*aš-šur*^{KI} *ma-a'-diš ú-kab-bi-tu-ma*] | […] | ⌜DUMU⌝.MEŠ ^{LÚ}ḪAL.MEŠ *šá a-na* [3-*šú a-na* 4-*šú a-zu-zu-šú-nu-ti*] | [*pa-a*] ⌜*e*⌝-*da iš-šak-nu-*[*ma i-pu-lu-in-ni an-na ke-e-nu* x x x x].

[191] SAA 16 21 9-rev. 8; and see also SAA 18 124 3–5 where something apparently has gone wrong with a report because it has been erased (reading uncertain).

In Rome, the private experts were treated with scepticism on account of the methods they used. However, in matters of public divination misgivings about ulterior motives were a much bigger worry: magistrates were accused of taking the auspices and looking the other way when it suited their purposes.[192] Whether this was true or not, in Rome—as in Greece and in Mesopotamia—there was a feeling that the expert had power over the divinatory process and that either he might abuse this power or simply get it wrong. However, while this may have affected the experts' standing in society, it surely also reflected their importance.

The foregoing discussion reveals that Mesopotamian experts were employed for longer periods of time by the same employer, appear to have been loyal, could rise higher up in the hierarchical ranking and did collaborate with others (this includes discussion and competition). The structured and steady nature of their work ensured they fell into the category 'high' in the 'occupation' branch of socio-economic status. The same could be said of the public Roman divinatory expert. In comparison to his colleagues, the unstructured nature of the occupation of the wandering *mantis* (and the private Roman expert) would have placed him in the category 'middle' or even 'low' socio-economic status. Always with the exception of those very few who really made it.

Income

An expert needed to live. The Mesopotamian expert employed by the palace would also have been paid by it. Although the astrologer does not feature in the Nimrud Wine Lists—an eight-century Assyrian administrative text—the *bārû* (for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ) received a daily ration—in kind—of, usually, two *qa* of wine for their group, the same as the A.ZU (*ašu*) and LÚ.MAŠ.MAŠ.MEŠ (*āšipu*).[193] The augurs from Commagene received four

[192] MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 41–42.

[193] In the Neo-Assyrian period, the standard *qû* was about 1.842 or 1.83 litres. Kinnier Wilson assumes that among the skilled and professional workers six men would share one *qû*: J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists: a study of men and administration at the Assyrian capital in the eighth century BC* (London 1972) 117. Cf. *CAD* Q 288–291. On the amounts for the various groups see Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists* (from now on KW). 2 qa? for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 6219, ob. 22 (KW text number 6); 2 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10047, ob. 28b (KW text number 8); ? qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ from 'Babylon' in ND 10055, 4 (KW text number 12); ditto for ND 10027 + 10028, ob. 20 (KW text number 13); 1.5 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10027 + 10028, rv. 8 (KW text number 13); 2? qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10056 12 (KW text number 15); ditto for ND 10033/10050 32 (KW text number 16); 2? qa ND

qa—and the Babylonian experts six *qa*—but it is not possible to verify whether the Babylonians were part of a larger group or were entitled to larger rations.[194]

The expert Urad-Gula describes how hard he worked and complains that his fellow scholar seems to be taking more than his fair share of the goods which are apportioned to the scholars:

> He is taking [for himself] the prime lot of garments [which came in on the 2]2nd and today, [gu]lēnu-coats, tunics, and mak[lulu]-clothes, every single one of them, and [shows] neither the chief [exorcist] nor Adad-šumu-uṣur that he has them. But we have ended up [empty]-handed; by which means are we supposed to fill the shortage of our garments? Whence are we supposed to get (our) wages, we who have not (even) as much money as a pupil of his? And yet the king knows [that] we are his equals![195]

Apart from the wine lists, we hear remarkably little about an expert being paid but in one Old Babylonian example a payment of four lambs is specified. There is a payment of a field of twenty acres and someone to work it, mules and oxen were provided, a share in the left-overs from great meals, or other providions; in another instance, the payment is in silver.[196] There are also indications that Old Babylonian experts could have been money-lenders and earned their living this way.[197]

10051 rv. 1 (KW text number 19); 3 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in 10053 obv. 10 (KW 30); 6 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ from 'Babylonia' in ND 10038 (lower half of obverse) 5 (KW number 30); 1 sūt for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ ND 2489, ii, 11 (KW text number 35) (a bread list); 5 qa voor LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ who were 'Babylonian' ND 10038 obv. 16' (S. Dalley & J.N. Postgate, *The tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (London 1984) no. 120). Cf. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists*, 75–76.

194 Augurs: 4 qa for augurs from Commagene in ND 6218, i, 4–5 (KW text no. 3); 4? qa for augurs ND 10063 3? (KW text no. 29). The experts from Commagene are but one of the examples of experts 'from abroad', which K. Radner shows: K. Radner, 'The Assyrian king and his scholars: the Syro-Anatolian and the Egyptian schools' in: M. Luukko, A. Svärd & R. Mattila (eds), *Of god(s), trees, kings, and scholars: Neo-Assyrian and related studies in honour of Simo Parpola* (Helsinki 2009) 221–238.

195 SAA 10 289 rev. 3–14. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. [x ^{TÚG}]ʳ*gu*ˀ-*zip-pi pa-ni-il*!-ʳ*ú*ˀ-[*te*] | [*ša* UD]-ʳ22ˀ-KÁM *ù ša ú-ma-a* ʳ*e*ˀ-[*ru-bu-u-ni*] | [TÚG].ʳGULˀ-IGI.2 TÚGᴵ.GADA ^{TÚG}*ma-ak-*[*li-li*] | ʳxˀ [x]-*šúᴵ am-marᴵ gab-bu-un-ni* [x x x] | *i-na-áš-ši la-a a-na* LÚ.GAL—[MAŠ.MAŠ] | *laᴵ a-na* ^{md}IM—MU—PAB *is-si-šú* [*ú-kal-lam*] | *ù a-né-en-nu* TA* *a-ḫi-in-*ʳ*niᴵ*ˀ [*ra-aq-te*] | *né-ta-li-a bat-qu ša* ^{TÚG}*gu-zip-pi-*ʳ*niᴵ*ˀ | *ina* ŠÀ *mi-i-ni ni-ik-ṣur* TA* *a-a-ka* | *ni-iš-ši-a ig-re-e ša am-mar* LÚ.TUR-*šú* | *a-ni-nu la ma-aṣ-ṣa-ni-ni ù* LUGAL *ú-da* | [*ki-i*] *me-eḫ-re-e-šú a-né-en-nu-ni.*

196 Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 62–63.

197 Richardson, 'Ewe should be so lucky', 230–231.

As noted, Greek experts were notorious for their proverbial greed and lust for payment (if necessary in kind).[198] They were paid by their clients, whether these were city states or individuals.[199] How much a *mantis* received is unknown: it appears that this could have been anything from relatively small amounts to large sums or expensive goods. Larger amounts were earned by famous experts, who were thought to be the best, like Hegesistratos who was reported to have earned great sums and was—presumably for that reason—reportedly a very zealous worker.[200]

Some more can be deduced about the amount an individual client would have had to pay for consulting an oracle. While taking into account that this was not a direct payment to the divinatory expert, it does tell how much it cost to make use of his services at an oracle site. The oracle of Alexandros of Abonouteichus is described as to have charged one drachma and two obols for each oracular consultation.[201] This was a very large sum indeed. At other Greek oracles, the sacrifice preceding the divination (*pelanos*) was later transformed into a monetary 'sacrifice' or payment to the oracle. The amount of the *pelanos* depended on where the client was from and whether he was a private individual or had consulted the oracle on behalf of a *polis*.[202] For instance, at Delphi, the *pelanos* for the *polis* of Phaselis cost ten Attic drachmai and for a private individual four obols (400 BC); for the bean oracle (during which a black or white bean was drawn as the alternative to an oracle), this was one stater for official delegations and two obols for a private person.[203] There were also different prices depending on which *polis* the client came from.[204]

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[198] Soph. *Ant*. 1055; Ar. *Av*. 594; Ath. 8.344ef; Lucian *Iupp. Trag*. 30.

[199] It can be expected that the pay was provided by the *polis* in the case of an elected expert (if these existed), but that a high-ranking individual would pay for his private expert. See the references above for possible official funding for experts employed 'privately' by generals, as perhaps attested in Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 4.2.

[200] Hdt 9.38.1. Supposedly this also applies to Thrasyllos: Isoc. *Aegineticus* 7. For the rich son of a seer: Hom. *Il.* 13.663–664.

[201] Although this might have been an exaggeration on Lucian's part: Lucian *Alex*. 23.

[202] Envoys were regularly sent to oracles to ask questions on behalf of their community, e.g., Hdt. 6.57.3.

[203] V. Rosenberger, 'Die Ökonomie der Pythia oder: wirtschaftliche Aspekte griechischer Orakel', *Laverna* 10 (1999) 153–164, at 154–155. The oracle at Delphi had a reputation for its riches—composed principally of costly dedications, but the structural income from the *pelanos* must have helped too: see, e.g., Ael. *VH* 6.9; Hdt. 3.57.2.

[204] As a comparison between the *pelanos* for individuals from two different town shows (although the first attestation is from the sixth or fifth century, and the second one is from the 4th—this might also explain the difference in price): G. Rougemont, *Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes* (Paris 1977) vol. 1, 8–10; 23–26.

There is uncertainty about other, additional, payments (not the *pelanos*) which would have had to be made to obtain an actual consultation at Delphi—Rosenberger thinks this was two obols for a consultation by the *polis* (Skiathos, in this case) and one obol for a private person.[205] However, this could be much more, one factor being which *polis* wanted an answer. Ultimately, how much exactly was paid for a consultation seems to have depended on the descent, profession and prestige of the client and the public or private purpose of his consultation, and on the prestige of the expert or oracle.[206]

No specific sources deal with payment of a public Roman expert in *collegia*, which makes sense because these experts were all high-ranking patricians, and later plebeians,—membership of a *collegium* confirmed prestige and Jörg Rüpke considers it plausible that, instead of being paid, potential experts paid a fee to become a member.[207] A Roman employing an expert privately would have paid him, or at least this is what has been speculated about Sulla's *haruspex* C. Postumius (who was, probably, "a salaried official").[208] There are few sources that touch upon private experts, but the same idea of experts' greediness as that in Greece is reflected in them.[209]

This investigation of the expert's income has not shed much light on the issue of socio-economic status. The reason for this is that sources are lacking. It must be concluded that payment depended on the skill of the individual expert, unless the latter had obtained official employment as happened in Mesopotamia. Structural employment changed matters quite drastically: the Mesopotamian expert would not be poor, nor would he have grown exceedingly rich like a Greek expert could become if he was very successful.

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[205] P. Amandry, *La mantique Apollinienne à Delphes* (Paris 1950) 102–103; Rosenberger, 'Die Ökonomie der Pythia', 155–156. However, for many sites we do not have this knowledge. For the oracle site of Korope, for example, we can only assume that a *pelanos* was paid: see Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 19–20.

[206] And also on the particular oracle. See for the best overview of different prices P. Bonnechere, *Trophonios de Lébadée: cultes et mythes d'une cité béotienne au miroir de la mentalité antique* (Leiden 2003) 57–58. For an overview of historical (non-oracular) experts that have been paid see Kett, *Prosopographie*, 105–109. However, it must have been tough to make ends meet as an expert for some: Ael. *VH* 10.6. Others struck it rich: Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, vol. 3, 71–78. Cf., e.g., Hdt. 5.45.2.

[207] Cic. *Div*. 2.65.134. Cf. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum*, vol. 3, 1461–1471.

[208] Rawson, 'The *Disciplina Etrusca*', 141.

[209] As in the late—for our purposes—source Apul. *Met*. 9.8.

Concluding Observations

One conclusion which has emerged from the above is that the Roman and Mesopotamian experts under investigation were higher up on the socio-economic scale than their Greek counterparts. The Greek expert had to use his charisma and rhetorical skills to be able to survive (which could make him either very rich or very poor but would leave most experts somewhere in between), whereas the Mesopotamian expert had a job as a learned man on the basis of his schooling and his descent.[210] The public Roman expert occupied his position on the basis of his pre-existing high status in society—his function as divinatory expert simply added to this status.

Besides socio-economic status, another etic distinction is possible: that between Greek *specialists* on the one hand and Mesopotamian *professionals* on the other. The latter had to fulfil certain requirements to qualify as professionals: they had formal training and were officially and publicly recognized as qualified experts. As a group, they had a virtual monopoly on the business of public divination. Above all, they were organized. It is not possible to argue the same for the majority of Greek *manteis* or for private Roman *haruspices*.[211] The public *haruspex, decemvir* and *augur* in Republican Rome embody an interesting mixture of the qualities ascribed to the Mesopotamian and Greek experts. They cannot be called either specialists or professionals in the strict sense of these words: although they did work in a clearly defined context, their employment as experts was on the basis of descent and status.

These findings are closely connected to the relatively high degree of institutionalization of divination in Mesopotamia and Rome (at least where public divination was concerned) compared to what can be gleaned from the Greek world. Institutionalization enables the creation of, for example, a curriculum which experts-to-be had to learn.[212] This structured

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[210] Some might be reminded of a Max Weber's ideas about the different kinds of authority of prophet and a priest: charisma for prophets and institution and tradition for the priest. See J. Rüpke, 'Controllers and professionals', *Numen* 43 (1996) 241–262, *passim*.

[211] See J. Rüpke, 'Controllers and professionals', *Numen* 43 (1996) 241–262, at 255–256.

[212] Cf. on the effects of institutional frameworks on scholarship Lloyd, *The ambitions of curiosity*, 126–147; G.E.R. Lloyd & N. Sivin, *The way and the word: science and medicine in early China and Greece* (New Haven 2002) 82–139; and more theoretical introductions are S.N. Eisenstadt in: N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* 23 (Amsterdam 2001) s.v. social institutions: the concept; A. Kuper & J. Kuper (eds), *The social science encyclopedia* (London 1996^2) s.v. institutions.

environment accounts for many of the factors which help Mesopotamian experts to score highly on the socio-economic scale.[213] In drawing these conclusions, we must not overlook the circumstance that public divinatory practices are over-represented in the sources from Rome and Mesopotamia. It must be assumed that there were also many experts working in private divination about whose circumstances next-to-nothing is known. These experts probably enjoyed a lower socio-economic status (comparable to that of the poorer Greek experts).

The relatively high degree of institutionalization in Mesopotamia not only entailed more bureaucratization, it also required the expert to have formal qualifications. In contrast, the lack of institutionalization in Greece led to the situation in which there was a lack of bureaucratization and experts did not need to have formal qualifications: their interpretations were based on their own experience and knowledge of divination and were therefore flexible. Their challenge was to build up a reputation for themselves by debate and performance—this was possible and indeed necessary, because there were no text-based mantic guidelines such as existed in Mesopotamia.[214] Every Greek expert needed to attract as many clients as possible by his charisma and personal authority.[215] He would have to entice individuals to use his services in their attempts to answer their questions—his job was an extremely competitive one. Clients, including rulers and elite, would *choose* to consult experts when they wanted to. The choice whether or not to use an expert, and if so which one, is an aspect which would probably have been absent if Greek divination had been more institutionalized.

Another consequence of institutionalization was that it affected the position of the expert in relation to the client. The Mesopotamian expert was employed by the king and was therefore dependent on him: at the same time the king needed divination to make decisions. The same dependency can be seen in Rome, but here the public expert was a political power in himself: the public experts and their clients belonged to one and the same social group. It can be said that the Greek expert stood on the same level as his client: he was not structurally employed for life and could go from

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[213] This is not to say that institutionalization is necessarily a 'good thing'—nor is a 'high' score on the socio-economic scale such a 'good thing'—these are not normative concepts. Institutionalization can be suffocating and negative, as well as enabling and positive.

[214] Cf. pp. 144–145. These ideas, although they are adduced about philosophers, doctors and the like, come from Lloyd & Sivin, *The way and the word*, 82–139.

[215] Flower, *The seer, passim*.

one client to the other, living independently. The client chose to consult him. This is one of the reasons the expert did not have any political power: decision making and divination were not closely integrated—both ordinary people and leaders *chose* to use divination instead. Consequently, institutionalization of divination mattered because it changed the model of interaction between decision making and divination.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIGNIFICANCE OF SIGNS

Without the sign, the *homo divinans* would have been out of a job. A divinatory sign was an occurrence which was thought to have been sent by the supernatural, was recognized as such and then interpreted by man, who thereby imbued it with meaning. No sign meant no divination: the acceptance of an occurrence as being a sign began the divinatory process.[1]

This is not the place to discuss various semiotic aspects of the sign, linguistic or non-linguistic,[2] nor do I discuss the difference between indexical and communicative signs. I categorize the divinatory sign as communicative and it might have been either linguistic or non-linguistic (the pronouncement of an oracle is a linguistic sign—if provided in human language—while the flight of the birds is a non-linguistic sign). The most important points here are the distinctions that signs were thought to come into being either spontaneously or after evocation, and that they could be observed or took the form of auditory signs. However, as discussed on pp. 23–24, human 'omen-mindedness' was always essential. It seems easy for humans to imagine occurrences have some purpose or meaning and consequently we assume these occurrences are placed in the world around us by some agent.[3] In the case of divinatory signs, these agents were supernatural beings.

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[1] For a Greek example see Xen. *Oec*. 5.18–5.19; Xen. *Symp*. 4.47–48. The Mesopotamian evidence indicates the same, e.g., in SAA 10 45 and SAA 10 50 where the astrologers write to the king saying that there are no signs to report; or texts such as SAA 10 151 and SAA 15 5 where the watch for signs was unsuccessful because of the bad weather conditions. For Rome see the official acceptance of *prodigia publica* on pp. 129–132.

[2] The bibliography on the topic (and on the possible relationship between divination and writing) is vast: see G. Manetti, *Theories of the sign in classical antiquity* (Bloomington, IND 1993) 2–5. On divination and writing see the work of J.J. Glassner, especially 'The invention of writing, Old Babylonian schools and the semiology of experts' (unpublished paper read at the conference 'Origins of early writing systems' at Peking University, Beijing, 5–7 October 2007) and J.J. Glassner, 'Écrire des livres à l'époque paléo-babylonienne: le traité d'extispicine', *ZA* 99 (2009) 1–81.

[3] The study of divination and its cognitive foundation is still in the teething stage. However, see Sørensen, 'Cognitive underpinnings', 314–318; Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination* and pp. 23–24.

During spontaneous divination the individual recognized an occurrence as an visual or auditory sign, but evoked divination required a preliminary action (often in the form of a ritual) to obtain the sign, after which it still had to be recognized for what it was. However, when a sign was evoked the individual knew what to look for. Both evoked and spontaneous signs could be an extraordinary occurrence which could only be accounted for by interpreting it as a sign from the supernatural—the birth of a hermaphrodite is one instance which springs to mind. However, the sign could also be an occurrence which was usually considered to be perfectly normal. The individual could, however, decide that, despite its apparent normality, an occurrence was in fact extraordinary and should be recognized as a sign. Only after recognition would the occurrence become significant: this is the first phase of the divinatory process described on pp. 21–22. Although this overarching model of how the divinatory sign was perceived to function was the same in Greece, Rome and Mesopotamia, there were also many differences in the ways signs manifested themselves, the reasons they were thought to be significant and the significance which was attributed to specific contexts in the interpretations of the signs.[4]

This chapter concentrates on examining what similarities and differences in matters of signs are to be found in our three cultural areas and, more importantly, considers the causes and possible implications of these. I will begin by examining emic views concerning the genesis of the sign: where were signs perceived to come from? How could occurrences be recognized as being actual signs from the supernatural? The chapter continues by exploring the validity of the idea that 'everything' could be a sign. Another apposite question in this context is what happened when an occurrence was not thought to be a sign. An exploration of these issues should provide insights into the role of the sign in the divinatory process.

A Variety of Signs

The Greek term *sēmeion* was a general term for the divinatory sign, including the pronouncements of oracles. However, there is a wider vocabulary which should be taken into account. Some of the key terms have been conveniently discussed by Giovanni Manetti and recently by Alexander

[4] Cf. Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 2.

Hollmann. Manetti distinguishes words such as *oiōnos*, which was used for signs related to the flight of birds and signs in general;[5] *phasma*, which was used for signs from the heavens but also as a more general term and *teras* which indicated an out-of-the-ordinary phenomenon.[6] Other terms include *symbolon, tekmērion* and *martyrion*.[7] Even though some distinction can be made between the terms, their meanings also overlapped and changed over time.

In Rome the vocabulary was also varied.[8] The *auspicia* were produced by the observation of birds and thunder presided over by *augures*, for example serving to validate an undertaking.[9] The more generic term *prodigium* designated a spontaneous sign thought to have come from the supernatural. A *prodigium publicum* was acknowledged as such by the Senate.[10] Theoretically, a public sign would have had to have taken place on state-owned land. A private *prodigium* occurred on private land. However, this distinction was not always strictly observed in ancient times and

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[5] For works on divination by means of birds see M. Dillon, 'The importance of *oionomanteia* in Greek divination' in: idem (ed.), *Religion in the ancient world: new themes and approaches* (Amsterdam 1996) 99–121; Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1, 127–145; J.R.T. Pollard, *Birds in Greek life and myth* (London 1977) 116–129. Inedible birds which were used were the following: the eagle was a very important sign (e.g., Xen. *An.* 6.1.23; Aesch. *Ag*. 104–139; Aesch. *Pers.* 201–210—a falcon plays a role here too; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 33.2–3; Xen. *An*. 6.5.2; Hom. *Il.* 8.247–8.252; Hom. *Il.* 24.315–325; Hom. *Od*. 20.240–243), furthermore there was the hawk (Hom. *Od*. 15.525–536; Hom. *Od*. 15.160–178; Hom. *Od*. 13.87 (pigeons and geese play a role here, but these are not the birds of ill-omen—only the victims)); the owl (Ar. *Vesp*. 1086; Theophr. *Char*. 16.8—its hooting was an omen); the swallow (Arr. *Anab*. 1.25.1–9); the crow/raven (Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 73.2; Ael. *NA* 3.9); and many other birds such as kites (Paus. 5.14.1). Edible birds attested as carrying signs were partridges (Ath. 656c) and herons (Hom. *Il.* 10.272–277). References from Pollard, *Birds*, 116–129.

[6] See for a more detailed study on the term '*teras*' I. Chirassi Colombo, '*Teras* ou les modalités du prodige dans le discourse divinatoire grec: une perspective comparatiste' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 221–251. See Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, xiv–xvi; 14 for a brief overview of the philosophical use of this vocabulary in ancient Greece.

[7] Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 9–19.

[8] See further on the term '*signum*': S. Dorothée, 'Signum' to be found online at the website of the CNRS Linguistique Latine project: http://www.linguistique-latine.org/pdf/dictionnaire/signum.pdf Visited 07-04-2011. S. Dorothée, 'Les employs de signum chez Plaute', *RevPhil* 76 (2002) 33–48; J.P. Brachet, 'Esquisse d'une histoire de lat. "signum" (Towards a history of lat. "signum")', *RevPhil* 68 (1994) 33–50.

[9] See references, one of which to an extensive bibliography by J. Linderski in Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 149 n. 236. It should be noted that there is a related divinatory process, the *augurium*: the two terms cannot be separated decisively from one another: it is often uncertain how they differ in meaning. Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 152–153, for a discussion and references.

[10] Cf. Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 35.

is a difficult one for modern scholars to determine.[11] In addition to the term *prodigium*, there were various, more specific terms, for instance *portenta* and *ostenta*, denoting signs given to collectives. *Monstra* were those extraordinary occurrences—such as birth deformities—with an inherently negative meaning.[12] This also applies to *dirae*. *Omina* were those signs occurring directly before an event.[13] However, there is uncertainty about the various terms.[14] To give some examples of opinions on this topic: F.B. Krauss indicates that "[…] *prodigium, portentum*, and *ostentum* are decidedly synonymous, whereas *omen* and *monstrum* have more specific limitations."[15] Other scholars support the contention that it is not an easy task to distinguish *portentum, ostentum, monstrum, praesagium* and *miraculum* from one another, and that this is also true of *prodigia* and *omina*:[16]

> At best, we can discern the tendency that in contrast to the *prodigia* that were important in the Republic for the Senate, that could take place at any time within a year, that were frequently considered to apply to the community, and always viewed as an expression of divine displeasure, *omina* occurred directly before an important event and foretold a future development. *Omina* could refer to a group or the community (e.g. Liv. 5,55,2) as well as to individuals: In 133 BC, when Ti. Gracchus stepped out of his house on the day of his murder, he bloodied his foot by hitting it against the threshold and ravens threw roof tiles in front of his feet (Plut. Ti. and C. Gracchus 17). Both signs indicated to him that it would be better if he stayed at home.[17]

The Mesopotamian vocabulary is as follows: *ittu* is a general word for sign; *tamītu* can mean a question asked the supernatural at an oracle, but also

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[11] Luterbacher, *Der Prodigienglaube und Prodigienstil der Römer*, 30–31. More recent and more extensive on this topic is Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 219–239 arguing it is incorrect to use acknowledged signs as indicators of the land on which they were reported being public land belonging to the Roman State. It can be shown that there were signs seen on private property which were nevertheless expatiated as public signs. This makes the argument about why signs were discarded or not deemed *prodigia publica* more difficult. Rasmussen also poses questions about the reliability of the sources which Livy used for 43.13 and queries why signs from *ager peregrinus* were reported at all, if the distinction was so clear and fixed as it has been argued to be.

[12] F.B. Krauss, *An interpretation of the omens, portents, and prodigies recorded by Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius* (Philadelphia 1930) 31–34, quote at 34.

[13] Cf. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 9.

[14] Recently most clearly described by Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen*, 259–282. See also his extensive footnotes.

[15] Krauss, *Omens, portents, and prodigies*, 34.

[16] Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 7–9.

[17] V. Rosenberger, 'Omen' in: *NewP*. Visited 10-04-2011.

the answer—a sign.[18] The word *têrtu* can also be translated as 'sign'—this was primarily used during extispicy but also in a more general sense.[19]

It should be noted that there are uncertainties about the terminology of signs in all three cultural areas. However, this does not impede the research: in this chapter all divinatory signs found in the sources (including those which seem to contravene the laws of nature) will be used as evidence although emphasis will be on official divination where Rome and Mesopotamia are concerned. The terminology used in the sources to refer to these signs is not of prime importance because the signs discussed here were all thought to come from the supernatural with the intention to communicate—otherwise they would not be divinatory signs. In what follows, I shall focus on various questions relating to the generation of perceived divinatory signs, underlining fundamental issues related to the functioning of the divinatory sign in the three cultural areas.

Receiving Spontaneous versus Evoked Signs

The occurrence of spontaneous signs was based on an existing reciprocal relationship between the human and the supernatural. The supernatural was thought to provide a sign voluntarily and because it wanted to.[20] Everyone enjoyed such a reciprocal relationship with the supernatural: this includes women, slaves and children of all ages. The individual had already established a relationship with the supernatural by giving a gift beforehand, or was going to do so at some point in the future. The pre-existence of these relationships means that everyone could receive a spontaneous sign without giving the supernatural a particular gift in exchange for the sign. The fact that the relationship was reciprocal and pre-existing, ensured that spontaneous signs would appear with some regularity: I give now so that you may give later.

In contrast, an evoked sign was usually thought to appear instantaneously after the act of evocation had taken place. Evoking signs was a ritual action through which the individual could give and receive directly. When signs were evoked, a short-term relationship between man and supernatural was created: I give now so that you can give now.

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[18] Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 6–7 for *tāmītu*/*tamītu*.

[19] See Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 70, and further on terminology S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale* (*Namburbi*) (Mainz am Rhein 1994) 6–7.

[20] Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 541–549; Hom. *Od.* 2.143–149.

For example, according to Herodotos, Croesus' gift to the supernatural ensured that he could ask a gift in return, in the shape of a sign:

> When the Lydians came to the places where they were sent, they presented the offerings, and inquired of the oracles, in these words: "Croesus, king of Lydia and other nations, believing that here are the only true places of divination among men, endows you with such gifts as your wisdom deserves. And now he asks you whether he is to send an army against the Persians, and whether he is to add an army of allies."[21]

Modern observers might discern a resemblance between the bestowal of an evoked sign and a market transaction, because both types of negotiation are relatively direct and on a tit-for-tat basis. However, the sources emphasize the social nature of these religious 'transactions'.

If a problem arose in the relationship between an individual and the supernatural, the individual would be like a man cast adrift: he would become an outcast in his society because he would be ruled out of participation in the communal feasts and sacrifices. This is a major theme in various tragedies.[22] For instance, a polluted individual was forbidden to approach an oracle site because he could not enter the *temenos*.[23] Despite this prohibition, he could still be the recipient of spontaneous signs (and perhaps even of certain evoked signs, although the sources are unclear in this respect). In tragedies it is indicated that, despite being incapable of upholding his part of the bargain, the polluted individual was still not deprived of his chance to receive signs and hence be relieved of his worries and uncertainties: in Sophokles' *Oidipous Kolonos* Oidipous still thought he had received a sign and Orestes was convinced he had received support from Apollo.[24] In other words, although participation in rituals entailing instantaneous give-and-take—for example, evoking signs—was out of the question for these individuals, they could still *receive* from the

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[21] Hdt. 1.53.2. Translation: A.D. Godley. Ὡς δὲ ἀπικόμενοι ἐς τὰ ἀπεπέμφθησαν οἱ Λυδοὶ ἀνέθεσαν τὰ ἀναθήματα, ἐχρέωντο τοῖσι χρηστηρίοισι λέγοντες· Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, ὑμῖν τε ἄξια δῶρα ἔδωκε τῶν ἐξευρημάτων, καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον.

[22] For example, in Soph. *OT* 235–239.

[23] Although the judgment of the supernatural was the final word in this: Ael. *VH* 3.44. Angering the supernatural was ill-advised and entry into the sanctuary would be denied by the god's wrath: Hdt. 9.65.2. See further the inscription as published in Lupu, *Greek sacred law*, number 12 (= *SEG* 26 524). This is perhaps a regulation stating that 'madmen' could not approach the oracle. Note that the readings of this inscription are disputed, as the references in *SEG* testify.

[24] Soph. *OC* 94–105; Aesch. *Eum.* 64–66.

supernatural. The Greek supernatural could, and would, still send signs—to everyone, even to those who were polluted or had incurred divine displeasure because, by definition, everyone was in a reciprocal relationship with the supernatural.[25]

Genesis of a Sign

From Whom?

As noted, the opinion of the ancient individual recognizing a sign as being divinatory, it came from the supernatural—otherwise he would not have considered it a divinatory sign (and non-divinatory signs are not dealt with here).[26] Some individuals, philosophers for example, may have had other thoughts about this—but these views are exceptional.[27]

A pertinent question is: when requesting an evoked sign, did the sign have to be requested from one particular member of the supernatural? If a particular member of the supernatural did have to be approached, how would an individual know whether or not he was addressing the right one? At many oracle sites, Apollo and Zeus were responsible for providing the signs—other oracle sites would have other 'divine patrons'.[28] So far, matters are quite clear-cut but in the other Greek divinatory sources—not related to oracles—it is often uncertain who was being called upon. The supernatural had to be involved. Either 'the gods' in general or specifically

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[25] We may wonder if this worked differently in the Near East: does *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* point toward the idea that the supernatural could refuse to provide signs? Or are, like in Greece, only evoked signs held back?

[26] There are, of course, different etic types of non-divinatory signs. I have already mentioned that there are linguistic and non-linguistic signs, as well as indexical and communicative signs. A recent publication on signs (in the widest sense of the word) in Herodotos distinguishes divinatory signs, personal names ("[…] a distinctive and special type of linguistic sign"), action, ritual and gesture ("can act as bearers of meaning which call for interpretation […]") and objects which function as signs ("which become meaningful when interpreted according to a certain code"): Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 143, 163, 176.

[27] See on the (in my opinion not widely existent) anxiety about signs which were not explicitly sent by the supernatural: p. 29 below but also Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 55–58.

[28] A site such as Dodona was under auspices of Zeus (e.g., Pind. *Ol.* 8.1–6), while Apollo was in charge of Delphi (e.g., Ael. *VH* 3.1; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.iv; Eur. *Ion* 5–7; Aesch. *Eum.* 1–18) but also, e.g., of the Trojan oracle in Hom. *Il.* 1.379–382. An example of another supernatural being in charge of an oracle is Trophonius (e.g., Paus. 9.39.1–14—see further on Trophonius through the eyes of Pausanias V. Pirenne-Delforge, *Retour à la source: Pausanias et la religion grecque* (Liège 2008) 325–331; and in general Bonnechere, *Trophonios de Lébadée*). An overview of oracle sites and their gods is: W. Friese, *Den Göttern so nah: Architektur und Topographie griechischer Orakelheiligtümer* (Stuttgart 2010).

Hermes or Apollo were called upon, or no specific members of the supernatural were entreated (but were left implicit).[29] On other occasions, when inspirational divination was supposed to have occurred, a god such as Dionysos was thought to have been involved.[30] There are also non-oracular examples of a particular god playing an explicit role in providing man with signs. In the following account, Apollo plays a central role in revealing a plot by means of dreams:

> For the fact that I met no such fate I have the gods to thank, who exposed the plot: above all, Apollo, who showed me dreams and also sent me men to interpret them fully.[31]

However, it was often not quite clear from which member of the supernatural the sign came.

Roman oracle sites were regularly thought to be under the patronage of a particular goddess: Fortuna. Unquestionably Jupiter and other gods played an important part in sending the signs. However, referring to many other non-oracular signs, sources generally refer to 'the gods' who have given signs or are displeased. Still, it appears that the officials explaining, interpreting and finding a remedy for the sign could find out which particular member of the supernatural was displeased and had sent the sign.[32]

Mesopotamian gods were also connected to specific oracle sites, most famously the goddess Ištar at Arbela, but some of them were also associated with certain divinatory methods. Šamaš was the god called upon during necromancy, helping to coax the ghost to enter into the skull whence he would then speak truthfully to the person who had evoked him. A first-millennium Mesopotamian text which is now in the British Museum reads as follows:

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[29] For Apollo and all divination see Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 471–472; and for Hermes see Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 527–537; cf. on Hermes but also on the 'three sisters of divination' Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 550–569; D. Jaillard, 'Hermès et la mantique Grecque' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 91–107. There were, of course, many other supernatural beings thought to have to do something with divination, e.g., as in Paus. 9.22.7.

[30] Melampos was supposed to have taught the Greeks about Dionysos. He is said to have learned this in Tyre: Hdt. 2.49. Cf., e.g., Eur. *Bacch.* 298–301; Hdt. 7.111.2; explicitly on the relationship between alcohol and divination: Ath. 2.37ef–2.38a. A reference to an oracle of Dionysos can be found in Hdt. 7.111.

[31] Lucian *Phal.* 1.4.14–16. Translation A.M. Harmon. Τοῦ μὲν δὴ μηδὲν παθεῖν τοιοῦτον οἱ θεοὶ αἴτιοι φωράσαντες τὴν ἐπιβουλήν, καὶ μάλιστά γε ὁ Πύθιος ὀνείρατά τε προδείξας καὶ τοὺς μηνύσοντας ἕκαστα ἐπιπέμπων.

[32] As did the *haruspices*: Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus*, 545.

> May he bring up a ghost from the darkness for me! May [he put life back(?)] into the dead man's limbs! I call [upon you], O skull of skulls. May he who is within the skull answer [me!] O Shamash, who brings light in (lit: who opens) the darkne[ss!].[33]

The gods Šamaš (and also Adad) were thought to provide the signs during the extispicy ritual. Some have assumed that Šamaš and Adad were the gods of divination in general, but there is no conclusive evidence to bolster this statement. In the extispicy ritual, the evocations were addressed either to both gods or only to Šamaš. The second type of evocation is more regularly attested in Neo-Assyrian times than in earlier periods.[34] The Neo-Assyrian queries to Šamaš can commence as follows: "Šamaš, great lord, give me a firm positive answer to what I am asking you!"[35] However, in the *tamītu* texts and in the *ikribu*, the prayer-rituals of the expert, the expert evoked both Šamaš and Adad, usually in the opening and the closing lines of his prayer, as part of the ritual of extispicy.[36] In this context, Šamaš is usually called upon as the 'lord of judgement'; Adad is named 'lord of the inspection' or 'lord of the prayer and inspection'.[37] If a distinction can be made on the basis of these titles (which were probably not as finely drawn in practice), Šamaš' role was that of deciding which sign would be given, while Adad made sure the inspection by the expert would be a proper one.

This still leaves open the question of why gods such as Šamaš, Adad, Jupiter, Zeus, Hermes and Apollo were chosen to be the overseers of particular methods or oracles. It has been suggested that from his elevated position Šamaš, the sun god, would have been able to oversee everything which happened

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[33] BM 36703 (= 80-6-17, 435) obv. column II 3'–6'. Edition and translation: Finkel, 'Necromancy', 9. A later edition is by J. Scurlock, *Magical means of dealing with ghosts in ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago 1988) 322. ⌜GIDIM *e-ṭú*⌝-*ti li-š*[*e-l*]*a-an-ni* UZU.SA UG_7 *I*[-*i*-x-x] | *gul-gul gul-gul-la-at a-ša-as*-[*si-ka/ki*] | *ša* ŠÀ *gul-gul-la-ta li-pu*-⌜*la*⌝-[*an-ni*] | ^{d}UTU *pe-tu-ú ik-le-t*[*i* (ÉN)].

[34] See the discussion (with a special focus on the *tamītu* texts) in Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 1–10. The two Semitic gods were mentioned in curses underpinning a treaty around 2300 BC and are found together more frequently in the Old Babylonian period. All these early references to a duo of deities are in a formal setting (a treaty curse, a political oath, reports of court cases). They appear as witnesses in court cases. No examples of combined worship can be found.

[35] Just one example of many: SAA 4 28 1: ^{d}UTU EN GAL-*ú šá a-šal-lu-ka an*-[*na*] GI.NA *a-pal-an*-[*ni*].

[36] As published by Zimmern, *Beiträge*, 96–121.

[37] ^{d}UTU *be-el di-nim* ^{d}IM *be-el ik-ri-bu ù bi-ri-im* (lines 1, 133, 126, 139, 141 of the Old Babylonian text YBT XI 23). Translated and transliterated by Starr, *Rituals*, 30–44; see further Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 8.

on earth, and therefore would have been a good judge of contentious issues—he was also the god of justice, after all.[38] This same line of argument could also be applied to Apollo as the sun god and the patron of important oracles; Zeus was the most powerful god in the Greek world; Hermes the messenger of the supernatural; Jupiter was considered a ruling power determining future occurrences in the Roman world; Fortuna was another very potent deity, concerned with chance, and therefore it would have been wise to have put questions to her.[39]

What Form?

Forms in which signs could appear are here categorized as four: they can be verbal and visual (writing); verbal and auditory (speech); non-verbal and visual ('phenomena'); and non-verbal and auditory (sounds).[40]

The Mesopotamian supernatural was said to 'write' (*šaṭāru* and *eṣeru*) the sign into the liver, but also into the sky, oil and other substances, as humans would write cuneiform signs on tablets: an emphasis on signs provided in a visual verbal form can be detected.[41] Consequently, the boundaries between cuneiform and divinatory signs were sometimes fluid: this was explicitly so when experts appear to have looked for actual cuneiform signs—which the supernatural would have written—inscribed on livers. Jean-Jacques Glassner has even asked himself whether "la divination, la volonté de déchiffrer les présages et de pénétrer le code graphique propre à la sphère divine, jouerait-elle un rôle moteur lors de l'invention [of writing]?"[42] Regardless of the merits of Glassner's speculative suggestion, it appears that, in theory, the Mesopotamian supernatural and educated humans did the same thing: they wrote.[43]

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[38] Cf. Démare-Lafont, 'Judicial decision-making', 335.

[39] It was not strange to ascribe qualities (among them those of being all-seeing or all-knowing) to all the gods but simultaneously to one god in particular at one particular time: H.S. Versnel, *Coping with the gods: wayward readings in Greek theology* (Leiden 2011), especially 398–399; 434–436. On Sky gods as all knowing gods see: ibidem, 437.

[40] On the basis of the division into visual and auditory as already made on pp. 22–23, with the explicit addition of a division into verbal and non-verbal.

[41] J.J. Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer: l'invention du cunéiforme* (Paris 2000) 258; Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures', 159–160; Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 48; Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 5.

[42] Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer*, 258–259.

[43] But note the discrepancy between theory and practice as indicated by Glassner: that the cuneiform sign and the ominous sign differed in a number of ways: "[…] the shape, the texture, the colour, and the position on the medium. The signification of a written sign,

The supernatural in Greece did not normally write (though the gods were thought to be able to read).[44] This is true of the Olympic gods at least (with the exception of Athena and the Muses, the patrons of writing).[45] The supernatural was conceived of as placing mainly visual (non-verbal) and auditory signs (speech and sounds) in the world. Given this cultural difference on emphasis on what the supernatural was perceived to do, the conceptions of the genesis and the nature of the divine sign in Greece and in Mesopotamia appear to have differed. The Roman world seems to have resembled the Greek world more closely than it did the Mesopotamian: Romans would interpret signs as an expression of the favourable or unfavourable opinion of the supernatural about a plan or the state of affairs, but normally not as divine writings.

These diverging conceptions of the sign show a difference which is crucial to our understanding of the process of divination and the role of the *homo divinans* (of course taking into account that this is relative). If the Mesopotamian sign was seen as a written (visual and verbal) expression, the process of divination was the translation of the written divine language into the written human language. The expert 'read' the signs written by the supernatural and transposed them into human discourse. Therefore, the education of the expert—on pp. 82–87—was essential: in the course of his scholarly training he would have obtained an understanding of both the divine and human language necessary to perform the interpretative process of divination. In a sense, the expert was a translator between the written language of the supernatural and man. In Greece, where the sign was not seen as a primarily linguistic phenomenon, the expert did not translate from one language to the other—instead, he commonly rendered the sign *into* a language expressed in words.

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once defined in its shape, does not change if its dimensions vary, or if it is written in one or another colour, if it appears in one or another place of the medium. On the contrary, in the case of an omen, all these parameters contribute to change its signification." Glassner, 'The invention of writing'.

[44] Cf. H.S. Versnel, 'Writing mortals and reading gods: appeal to the gods as a dual strategy in social control' in: D. Cohen (ed.), *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle im klassischen Athen* (München 2002) 37–77, at 60–63; also the notes in Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 383 n. 13. An exception seems to be the *Himmelsbrief*.

[45] A. Henrichs, 'Writing religion: inscribed texts, ritual authority, and the religious discourse of the polis' in: H. Yunis (ed.), *Written texts and the rise of literate culture in ancient Greece* (Cambridge 2003) 38–58, at 38–40.

Manifestation of Signs

> Before undertaking anything, whether a business transaction, a marriage, or the purchase of food, you consult the birds by reading the omens, and you give this name of omen to all signs that tell of the future. With you a word is an omen, you call a sneeze an omen, a meeting an omen, an unknown sound an omen, a slave or an ass an omen. Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you?[46]

Although Aristophanes implies differently, it is an exaggeration to state that 'everything' could potentially be perceived to be a Greek sign, from a sneeze to a slip of a foot to a shout to an encounter and everything in between. The sign was closely related to the object which functioned as carrier of the sign (the medium). Nevertheless, there appear to have been various objects which did *not* tend to function as a medium.

The preferences for some mediums can be explained by the availability of a particular medium, or geographical and climatological factors. For example, divination using rivers and canals appears to have occurred in Mesopotamia—although perhaps not very frequently—but not normally in Greece.

In the Greek world, the supernatural would generally provide signs in objects which were considered 'natural' as opposed to 'cultural' (I see natural and cultural as the two ends of a sliding scale).[47] In other words, the supernatural would place a sign in the rustling of a tree, the movements of animals, the spontaneous babbling of a child or the chance remark of an adult (if language is considered something natural), but only very rarely in cultural constructs. One exception to this rule were those cultural constructs explicitly associated with the divine, such as cult images.[48] I shall illustrate this argument by examining the use of potentially edible items

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[46] Ar. *Av.* 717–722. Translation E. O'Neill Jr. Ἐλθόντες γὰρ πρῶτον ἐπ' ὄρνις οὕτω πρὸς ἅπαντα τρέπεσθε, | πρός τ' ἐμπορίαν, καὶ πρὸς βιότου κτῆσιν, καὶ πρὸς γάμον ἀνδρός. | Ὄρνιν τε νομίζετε πάνθ' ὅσαπερ περὶ μαντείας διακρίνει· | φήμη γ' ὑμῖν ὄρνις ἐστί, πταρμόν τ' ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε, | ξύμβολον ὄρνιν, φωνὴν ὄρνιν, θεράποντ' ὄρνιν, ὄνον ὄρνιν. | ἆρ' οὐ φανερῶς ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν ἐσμὲν μαντεῖος Ἀπόλλων.

[47] This division refers, obviously, to C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit* (Paris 1964). I do not discuss his theories in greater detail, although there would be plenty to say. I merely use these words to sketch a contrast which, in my opinion, was present in the Greek world. I am aware of Levi-Strauss' ideas about these terms and the problems with them—which I hope to have avoided by using natural and cultural as points on a sliding scale: there are many grey areas in between.

[48] In contrast to Mesopotamian cult images these were not considered to be the living god: W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 153.

during the divinatory process: during preparation, foodstuffs move from being a natural to a cultural object—from being raw to being cooked.

Fish were suitable mediums for both evoked and spontaneous divination. Pliny reports an extraordinary way of consulting the supernatural at an oracle in Asia Minor, which appears to have represented a Lycian tradition:[49]

> When the fishes seize it [the food] with avidity, the answer is supposed to be favorable; but if, on the other hand, they reject the food, by flapping it with their tails, the response is considered to be unfavorable.[50]

These divinatory fish were clearly alive and part of the natural world: they could function as a medium. Now, Herodotos relates the miraculous movement of dead fish which were in the fire when Artayctes saw them and realized they were an unprovoked sign meant for him:

> It is related by the people of the Chersonese that a marvelous thing happened one of those who guarded Artayctes. He was frying dried fish, and these as they lay over the fire began to leap and writhe as though they had just been caught. The rest gathered around, amazed at the sight, but when Artayctes saw this strange thing, he called the one who was frying the fish and said to him: "Athenian, do not be afraid of this portent, for it is not to you that it has been sent; it is to me that Protesilaus of Elaeus is trying to signify that although he is dead and dry, he has power given him by the god to take vengeance on me, the one who wronged him. Now therefore I offer a ransom, the sum of one hundred talents to the god for the treasure that I took from his temple. I will also pay to the Athenians two hundred talents for myself and my son, if they spare us."[51]

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[49] For other attestations on this Lycian tradition see Polycharmos apud Ath. 8.333d–f; Plin. *NH* 31.18.22; Plin. *NH* 32.8.17 (references from, and see further T.R. Bryce, *The Lycians in literary and epigraphic sources* (Copenhagen 1986) 196–198); R. Lebrun, 'Quelques aspects de la divination en Anatolie du sud-ouest', *Kernos* 3 (1990) 185–195, at 192–195; Artem. 1.70–71. This last attestation also concerns fish—yet, Artemidoros is not concerned with the reading of signs from the fishes' behaviour or movement, but he discusses the fish as an object whose perceived eating could be either a positive or a negative sign when appearing in a dream. It is therefore less relevant to our purpose (and a late source at that).

[50] Plin. *NH* 31.18.22.6–7. Translation J. Bostock. Edition: Teubner. Responsa ab his petunt incolae cibo, quem rapiunt adnuentes, si vero eventum negent, caudis abigunt.

[51] Hdt. 9.120.1–15. Translation A.D. Godley. Καί τεῳ τῶν φυλασσόντων λέγεται ὑπὸ Χερσονησιτέων ταρίχους ὀπτῶντι τέρας γενέσθαι τοιόνδε· οἱ τάριχοι ἐπὶ τῷ πυρὶ κείμενοι ἐπάλλοντό τε καὶ ἤσπαιρον ὅκως περ ἰχθύες νεάλωτοι. Καὶ οἱ μὲν περιχυθέντες ἐθώμαζον, ὁ δὲ Ἀρταΰκτης ὡς εἶδε τὸ τέρας, καλέσας τὸν ὀπτῶντα τοὺς ταρίχους ἔφη· Ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, μηδὲν φοβέο τὸ τέρας τοῦτο· οὐ γὰρ σοὶ πέφηνε, ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ σημαίνει ὁ ἐν Ἐλαιοῦντι Πρωτεσίλεως ὅτι καὶ τεθνεὼς καὶ τάριχος ἐὼν δύναμιν πρὸς θεῶν ἔχει τὸν ἀδικέοντα τίνεσθαι. Νῦν ὦν ἄποινά μοι τάδε ἐθέλω ἐπιθεῖναι, ἀντὶ μὲν χρημάτων τῶν ἔλαβον ἐκ τοῦ ἱροῦ ἑκατὸν τάλαντα καταθεῖναι τῷ θεῷ, ἀντὶ δ' ἐμεωυτοῦ καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀποδώσω τάλαντα διηκόσια Ἀθηναίοισι περιγενόμενος.

These were fish in the process of being prepared for consumption: the borderline is in the cooking. Before the fish were done, they were still part of nature and could be used as a medium as in the above. When they were ready to be eaten, they had become a part of the meal—a cultural construct—and were no longer appropriate to serve as a medium for divinatory signs: we have no such attestations in the sources.

This applies to other foodstuffs: I shall examine some doubtful instances of foodstuffs—flour, eggs, cheese and the *splanchna*—used as a divinatory medium. My first object is the liver (and the other organs) used during extispicy. The animal would first have to have been ritually slaughtered and its intestines inspected. When this had been completed, a communal meal would have been held at which individuals ate, among other dishes, the *splanchna*, the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidneys.[52] Portions were not the prerogative of humans: a god such as Hermes (according to some sources) would have been served his share as well. If divination was performed, this was done when the intestines were raw.

Eggs, too, were, at least in their uncooked state, raw products and could therefore be used to divine with (although it should be noted that divination by means of eggs was a very uncommon practice).[53] *Aleuromanteia* and *alphitomanteia* were two ways of divining using flour. Although there were differences in the origin and production of *alphita* and *aleura*, both were a half-finished product which was not ready for consumption.[54] Cheese, on the other hand, *was* an edible product which was used as a medium for signs and therefore appears to be an exception to the basic rule. The production of cheese is already attested in Homer's *Odyssey*: the Cyclops makes cheese.[55] It was produced and eaten regularly. Hence, cheese seems to be the only problematic foodstuff, as it was a product made by man and a medium for signs. However, during the period with which I am concerned in this monograph cheese does not seem to have

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For other spontaneous signs see Ath. 8.331f; 8.361e. Fish could appear in oracles as in Hdt. 1.62.4–1.63.3.

[52] Arist. *Part. An.* 665a28–672b8. Cf. Van Straten, *Hierà kalá*, 131. See for the best discussion of an eating Hermes: Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 310–377.

[53] Only one reference to divination by means of eggs can be found. See the *ovispex* in C.A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus sive de theologiae mysticae Graecorum causis II. III. Idemque Poetarum Orphicorum dispersas reliquias collegit* vol. 1 (Königsberg 1829) 361. Eggs of other birds were a more luxury food: A. Dalby, *Food in the ancient world from A to Z* (London 2003) s.v. egg.

[54] Cf. on *alphita* and *aleura* L.A. Moritz, *Grain-mills and flour in classical antiquity* (Oxford 1958) 149.

[55] Hom. *Od.* 9.237–249.

been used to divine with.[56] In a nutshell, the supernatural was not generally considered to have chosen prepared foodstuffs ready for consumption as a vehicle for signs.

These findings on food and divination are only a part of a larger divinatory reality: a distinction is maintained between the cultural and natural world. Of course there are exceptions, such as the roasted meat described in Homer and the poured wine in Athenaios.[57] Still, in the Greek world the supernatural tended to place signs in the natural world. Why? Perhaps because the natural world could not be influenced by humans, which made it more suitable for divination: the medium in which the sign was placed had to be 'unspoiled' and not susceptible to human influence—which added to its high level of reliability. For example, the Pythia at Delphi was supposed to be unsusceptible to human influence and was therefore generally seen as very reliable (although some argue differently, saying the Pythia could be bribed).[58]

In Rome, too, 'natural' signs were the most important. The liver and birds, important mediums in Rome, are both 'natural'. From the prodigies listed in Livy and Julius Obsequens, it would seem that Roman prodigies can be assigned to four categories: 1) inanimate in the heavens, 2) inanimate on the land, 3) actions of animals and 4) actions of humans. The first category consists of lightning, thunder, storms, showers of stones, earth, blood, rain and other water portents, the sun, moon, meteors and comets, unusual nocturnal lights and strange manifestations in the sky. The second category, signs in inanimate entities on the land, consists of earthquakes, the subsidence or upthrust of the land, plagues and pestilence, fire, the appearance of blood and trees. Animals which could function as signs included birds, wolves, serpents, bees, wasps, locusts, mice, fish, cows, oxen and bulls, horses, mules and asses, pigs, lambs, goats and domestic fowl. Humans could function as signs when a child was born deformed, if a person had a peculiar deformation in form or shape (such as a remarkable mole and so on), if a person made a certain utterance or stumbled and fell.[59] Furthermore dreams, the appearance of ghosts, mysterious voices and sounds, accidental occurrences, the 'behaviour' of

[56] Although we have two attestations, these are both late: Artem. 2.69; Ael. *NA* 8.5. Artemidoros, although late in time, denigrates those who divine by cheese as liars and false prophets, mentioning them in one breath with Pythagoreans, palmists and necromancers.

[57] Hom. *Od.* 12.395–397; Ath. 1.13de.

[58] Thuc. 5.16.2–3; Hdt. 6.66.

[59] Cf. Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 53–116.

statues and images, or the lack of chastity of vestal virgins were all taken to be spontaneous signs. Within their categories, these signs were all manifestations of signs in 'natural' mediums—with the exception of the 'behaviour' of statues and images.

In Mesopotamia, the range of mediums in which signs could manifest themselves was much wider: in addition to the signs in natural objects and half finished products, in the compendium *Šumma ālu* signs are also manifested in manmade objects.[60] Examples are the way a city or particular houses within that city were laid out; the way the foundations of a house were laid, what a house looked like, the doors of a temple, palace and house, repairs to various buildings and the temple and so on.[61] Other examples include divination by means of artificial light (fire and lamps).[62]

Although some Greeks poked fun at people in their own society who tended to regard 'everything' as a potential medium, on the basis of the above it seems that this was an overstatement. In contrast to this, the idea that signs might manifest themselves in any natural or man-made object or phenomenon was commonplace in Mesopotamia.

Preferred Divinatory Methods

Not all methods were deemed equally reliable. In Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia two methods were preferred: astrology and extispicy. It should then be noted that, although cultural constructs could be used as mediums in Mesopotamia, they were not considered the most reliable. Some claim that astrology enjoyed a somewhat higher status in the Neo-Assyrian period. They argue that extispicy was the preferred method until the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the first.[63] Celestial observation is supposed to have assumed a more important role in the

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[60] On signs in animals see P.-A. Beaulieu, 'Les animaux dans la divination en Mésopotamie', *Topoi*, suppl. 2 (2000) 351–365. Recently, Stefan Maul has published an article on aleuromancy, a half finished product—see his bibliography for an overview of the primary and secondary literature available: S.M. Maul, 'Aleuromantie: von der altorientalischen Kunst, mit Hilfe von Opfermehl das Maß göttlichen Wohlwollens zu ermitteln' in: D. Shehata, F. Weiershäuser & K.V. Zand (eds), *Von Göttern und Menschen: Beiträge zu Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Orients: Festschrift für Brigitte Groneberg* (Leiden 2010) 115–130.

[61] Published of *Šumma ālu* are Tablets 1–40 (Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*). The unpublished Tablets 40–53 from the same series are said to contain similar content.

[62] According to Maul, 'Omen und Orakel', *Šumma ālu* Tablets 91–94. Divination by means of 'cultural light' is also come across in the Greek Magical Papyri (which are not discussed further here).

[63] Starr, *Rituals*, 4–5.

Neo-Assyrian period—although confirmation by extispicy was sometimes still considered necessary.[64] Others argue that extispicy remained the most important method.[65] Wherever the truth lies, the prominent position still taken by extispicy is underlined by the fact that it was used to check and confirm other methods, such as dreams: thus, a dream of Assurbanipal had to be confirmed by extispicy.[66] Both astrology and extispicy are examples of expensive scholarly divination: a professional expert was required and an animal and other offerings were indispensable in the use of extispicy. These more expensive, and therefore exclusive, methods were also deemed the most reliable.

In Greece, oracles—by means of auditory signs—seem to have been the preferred divinatory methods: the consensus was that these were the most reliable, although there are also many reports of extispicy taking this position in a military context. The primacy of oracles can also be observed in Plato where he argues that inspiration, or *mania*, is a divine gift, whereas non-inspired divination is a human creation.[67] The former was thought much more reliable. A passage from Euripides suggests that this view was shared by at least some of his contemporaries: "[…] the oracles of Loxias are sure, but human prophecy I dismiss".[68] Theoretically, everyone could travel to a famous oracle to ask his or her question, or—if making a long journey was not an option—visit a local oracle. Only an educated guess can be made about the status of the other methods. The wealthy appear to have used provoked ornithomancy and extispicy: these must have been more expensive than other methods because an expert would have been required (who would need to be paid or compensated) and birds and other animals had to be bought or kept.[69] The remaining evidence for cleromancy and similar methods is scant, the exception being that from

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[64] This has been argued many times see, e.g., Farber, 'Witchcraft, magic and divination', 1907; E. Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut: poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (Michigan 1985) 9.

[65] Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 610–611; 634–634.

[66] For such a dream and its confirmation by means of extispicy see SAA 4 202.

[67] Pl. *Phdr*. 244d. See also for the connection between 'mania' and divination Eur. *Bacch.* 298–299.

[68] Eur. *El.* 399–400. Translation E.P. Coleridge. βροτῶν δὲ μαντικὴν here stands for non-inspired methods of divination. '[…] Λοξίου γὰρ ἔμπεδοι χρησμοί, βροτῶν δὲ μαντικὴν χαίρειν ἐῶ.

Or see, for a mantic dream which is checked by consulting an oracle: Aesch. *PV* 655–662; and for a 'sign in the sky' which is checked by consulting an oracle Dem. *Orat*. 43.66; and Plutarch's ideas about the primacy of oracular practice (Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or*. 407c).

[69] References to ornithomancy by the kings and powerful individuals are abundant (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 24.290–295; Pind. *Isthm*. 6.42–54). See for extispicy used by high-ranking individuals a source such as Eur. *El.* 800–843.

Roman Asia Minor: these were probably popular methods of divination for the poor.[70] Given their exclusivity, ornithomancy and extispicy could have enjoyed a higher status than other methods of divination, but they do not appear to have been as preferred as oracles were.

In Roman divination of the Republican period, the *prodigia* (and *omina*)—remarkable occurrences—were very important, influencing the course of daily life in all its aspects. *Prodigia* were extensively recorded by authors such as Livy and Julius Obsequens. When the Senate had decided that a certain occurrence was a *prodigium publicum* and accepted it as such, expiations were usually required. This had consequences for daily business in the city of Rome: trade and politics could be influenced by the measures thought necessary. Other important methods were the inspection of the *exta*—after sacrifice—and the *auspicia* (observation of the behaviour of birds in a limited area)—which were performed before such events as sessions of the Senate, lawsuits, new endeavours and so on, which gave them an important public function. Interpretations of *prodigia, omina* and the inspection of *exta* and *auspicia* were the three preferred forms of divination in Republican Rome. There is no strong or convincing indication that one of these was generally perceived to have been more reliable than the others.

These findings lead to the observation that in Rome and Mesopotamia objects and natural phenomena, here classified in the category of visual signs, were used as highly esteemed mediums, whereas in Greece oracles, in the category of auditory signs, were most popular in addition to visual signs. Of course, this difference is not clear-cut. An explanation must tie in with more general ideas about divination in the three cultural areas. Some observations can be made: as noted before, supernatural 'writing' played a more important role in Mesopotamia, corresponding to the literate nature of Mesopotamian divination (pp. 116–117). The Greeks seemed to have had a—relative—preference for being contacted by their supernatural by means of auditory signs. Hence, it seems logical that words or non-verbal noises (for example, auditory signs such as the rustling of leaves) uttered or induced by the supernatural were deemed the most reliable way of hearing from them. This assertion fits in with the relatively more oral nature of Greek divination. In Rome, the supernatural appears to have manifested itself in visual 'pictures' formed by objects

[70] In Artemidoros, we find that some ways of divining (cleromancy, necromancy and so on) are dismissed as unreliable: Artem. 2.69.

(dead or alive). Might this indicate a relative preference for visual supernatural signs and a visual divinatory culture?

Recognizing a Sign

How could a sign be recognized? When a sign was evoked, the individual involved already knew what he was looking for. But when did an individual judge an occurrence to have been a spontaneous sign sent by the supernatural? This is where *homo divinans* and text come together.

A Sign?

The Mesopotamian compendia provide us with a precise indication of what spontaneous signs were supposed to look like. Apart from perceived spontaneous movements and appearances of the moon, sun, stars and other celestial and atmospheric phenomena—such as the weather—treated in *Enūma Anu Enlil*, examples of specific spontaneous signs on earth can be found in *Šumma ālu*. Among these are incidents in the home, the people who visited the home, the behaviour of animals (especially snakes, scorpions and other small animals and insects) in the city, the behaviour of domestic animals kept in the vicinity of the home such as sheep, oxen, donkeys and horses, the behaviour of wild animals such as elephants and lions, the way a lamp shone and so on and so forth.[71] All these occurrences, and many more referred to in other compendia, could be recognized as signs. But how?

Of course there were signs which were considered monstrous and exceedingly strange—and therefore instantly recognizable. Some of these signs are discussed in the Mesopotamian satirical text *Aluzinnu*—translated as 'The Jester'.[72] Unfortunately, this text has been preserved only in a very fragmentary condition. In this category, occurrences such as that a cow spoke, that a four-footed cock was born or that particular objects—such as statues—were struck by lightning were thought to be such extraordinary occurrences they needed an explanation.[73] A Roman

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[71] Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 59–60.

[72] Edition and translation B.R. Foster, 'Humor and cuneiform literature', *JANES* 6 (1974) 69–85, at 74–79; W. Römer, 'Der Spassmacher im alten Zweistromland, zum "Sitz im Leben" altmesopotamischer Texte', *Persica* 7 (1975/1976) 43–68.

[73] The examples can be found in Obseq. 53. For a Greek example see Ael. *VH* 12.57. See also for a more abstract explanation about the reasons an individual would consider an occurrence to be a sign: A. Lisdorf, 'If a dog pricks up its ears like a wolf, it is a bad

sign such as the birth of a deformed animal can be designated as 'exceedingly strange', as can the Greek fish which began to move when they were prepared.[74] Therefore, first of all a sign could be anything out of the ordinary. It has been said that "for the Mesopotamian, in other words, the ominous significance of reality did not lie in the normally functioning universe, but in the deviations from it [. . .]."[75] The same has been argued for Roman and Greek signs. However, the occurrence itself was not necessarily an obvious deviation from normality at all—it was the individual who made it so. When an animal crossed the road, this did not have to be a deviation from normality as such. In other words, no exceedingly strange thing had to happen for a divinatory sign to occur, but an individual had to notice the occurrence and find it significant: 'significance' was very much in the eye of the beholder.

A number of other factors might have stimulated the individual to consider an occurrence a sign. A. Lisdorf reflects that something could occur which "[. . .] in some way relates to a current concern of the agent; secondly, the occurrence might belong to a culturally established catalogue of signs; thirdly, the occurrence might be so attention demanding in itself that it seemed to demand an explanation."[76] In Cicero's *De divinatione*, it is reported that Lucius Paulus was elected consul for the second time and was also given command of the war against Perseus.[77] When he came home and kissed his daughter Terentia, she was sad because her puppy, Persa, had just died. Lucius Paulus took this to be a positive sign meaning that he would win the war. This is an example of a sign that appears applicable to the situation: Lucius Paulus had a current concern and recognized and interpreted an occurrence to address it.[78] Another way a sign could be said to have occurred was because 'everyone' recognized it as such because it was embedded in the communal memory. A Roman example

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sign . . . Omens and their meanings' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (ed.), *Unveiling the hidden: contemporary approaches to the study of divination* (forthcoming).

[74] See on the fish Hdt. 9.120. Deformed animals (and humans) can be found throughout the literature on *prodigia* and *monstra*.

[75] Starr, *Rituals*, 3.

[76] This paragraph and the next are based on Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination*, 191–192. Quote at 191.

[77] Cic. *Div*. 1.46.103; Val. Max. 1.5.3. For a Greek example see the way Thucydides reports the mutilation of the herms: it was thought to be a sign relating to a military expedition (Thuc. 6.27.1–6.27.3).

[78] See for a Greek—mythical but illustrative example: Apollod. *Epit*. 3.

is the observation of birds thought to be negative signs.[79] An example of a normally positive sign was the hearing of a thunderclap to the left.[80]

The three main categories (extraordinary occurrence, applicable occurrence, occurrence in communal memory) could also overlap and come into play simultaneously. It could be argued, for instance, that in the ancient world an eclipse was almost always deemed to be a sign from the supernatural, on account of its extraordinary impact on nature and its rarity. Thucydides relates that people were shocked by the fact that certain alarming occurrences such as eclipses took place with such frequency during the Peloponnesian war.[81] Arguably, these eclipses fall into all three categories: apart from the fact that an eclipse demanded attention and required some explanation, the Greeks were fighting a great war and they were alert to all occurrences which might have come from the supernatural. The eclipse was a standard sign in all mental or physical catalogues of signs: everyone recognized it and was affected by its perceived consequences—all the Greek soldiers, the Roman legionaries and the king of Assyria too.[82] An example of a Roman sign which fits the second and third categories is the birth of a hermaphrodite, which was both inherently negative in the communal mind ánd required an explanation as it was so extraordinary. Recognition of Greek, Mesopotamian and Roman signs did, in this sense, not differ much.

When in Doubt…

The *homo divinans* always had the option of deciding—on the spot and on whichever basis he had—whether or not he considered an occurrence to be a sign. He was also allowed to express doubt. When a potential sign occurred in Mesopotamia there was always a written compendium which could be consulted. This textual basis for divination—in combination with an expert's training—also ensured that an expert would know what to do when a client consulted him about a potential sign. When the expert had to interpret a sign for his king, he extracted from his compendia those

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[79] See the birds mentioned as *dirae aves* in Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 4, 199.

[80] Cic. *Div*. 2.35.74. These examples are paraphrased by Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination*, 192.

[81] Thuc. 1.23.3. Cf. on eclipses (not exclusively during the Peloponnesian war) Thuc. 2.28.1; 2.8.3; 7.50.4; Hdt. 5.86.4; 9.10.3; 8.64.1; Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 23.

[82] The Roman soldiers were told an eclipse would come and that they should not panic because this was, according to their leader, a natural phenomenon: Liv. 44.37.5–9. That the king should not be afraid: SAA 10 57.

lemmata he regarded as potentially relevant or applicable. These would be sent to the king in a letter. He would decide on which lemma he found most appropriate (perhaps by consulting other experts).[83] Still, it was not a straightforward process for the expert to connect an occurrence to a particular lemma in his compendium: there was more than one option.[84] This has been called the polyvalence of the sign.[85]

In the Greek world, the question of whether or not an occurrence should be considered to be a sign was even harder to answer. When something occurred there were usually no sets of written textual guidelines (with the exception of a text such as that of Melampos and later in time dream books and guidelines for dice oracles) to help in deciding which occurrence was a sign where intuition or experience fell short.[86] When in doubt, an individual would call in an expert who would decide either on the basis of his personal experience or precedent.[87]

In Rome a number of occurrences were regularly classified as signs. The most obvious were, again, the absolutely extraordinary events.[88] Furthermore, it seems that certain occurrences had to be accepted into the communal discourse as being a *prodigium publicum*, only after which it would have been permissible to report them as such. Whenever a precedent had been created (it is still uncertain how this was done—a list of 'recognized' signs would have been a suitable vehicle to assist in such an endeavour, but no such document is known), the first report of a particular sign would be followed by others. This idea is supported by the overview of *prodigia* drawn up by S. Rasmussen.[89] A development can be traced in the acceptance of lightning strikes or thunder as a sign. The earliest reference is found in Livy's account of the year 295 BC:

> This year, so successful in the operations of war, was filled with distress at home, arising from a pestilence, and with anxiety, occasioned by prodigies: for accounts were received that, in many places, showers of earth had fallen;

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[83] SAA 10 100.

[84] As, e.g., in SAA 10 23.

[85] Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures, 161–165; S.B. Noegel, " 'Sign, sign, everywhere a sign': script, power, and interpretation in the ancient Near East" in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 143–154, at 150–152.

[86] For dice oracles see those published in Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*. It should be noted that the dice oracles known to us are mainly from the first centuries AD, so rather late for the purposes of this discussion.

[87] Cf. the grounds for interpretation on pp. 189–192.

[88] Pliny gives a number of examples in Plin. *NH* 17.38.244–245.

[89] Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 53–116.

> and that very many persons, in the army of Appius Claudius, had been struck by lightning; in consequence of which, the books were consulted.[90]

The thirty-three signs, reported in the years before 295 BC and collected by Livy (and Rasmussen) do not include either lightning or thunder. Although lightning and thunder had probably been interpreted in divinatory fashion—brontoscopy—before, they had not previously been reported and accepted as *prodigia*, as far as we can tell from the sources. This might be more than a coincidence: after 295 there was never a succession of thirty-three signs in a row of which at least not one consisted of something or someone being struck by lightning or a sign in the rumblings of thunder. This lends support to the theory that 295 BC marks the acceptance into the general discourse of lightning strikes or thunder as a sign, which was something both individuals and experts knew they could report. Precedents and procedures ingrained in the communal memory seem to have played a major role in the Roman reporting of possible signs by individuals and the acceptance (or rejection, see below) of these as signs by the Senate.

The Roman official acknowledgement of occurrences as signs was heavily based on communal discourse and precedent (as part of procedures, as will be discussed); in Mesopotamia it was based on the systematization of written text; in Greece on personal authority and precedent (something which will be discussed further in chapter 7). In the absence of written text, decisions about what was and what was not a sign were made in different ways. The *homo divinans* based his judgement of a sign either on an oral tradition, on his past experience with divine signs or on earlier events preserved in the communal memory whose contents were beyond argument or dispute. Again, this made the Greek *homo divinans* relatively more important in the process of distinguishing ordinary occurrences from signs. The decision was made on the basis of his personal authority, which he would continually have needed to assert by making the 'right' decisions.

Not a Sign?

Recognizing an occurrence as a sign was one thing—deciding that an occurrence which could potentially be a sign, was actually not a sign,

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[90] Liv. 10.31.8. Translation: D. Spillan & C. Evans. Felix annus bellicis rebus, pestilentia grauis prodigiisque sollicitus; nam et terram multifariam pluuisse et in exercitu Ap. Claudi plerosque fulminibus ictos nuntiatum est; librique ob haec aditi.

was something else indeed. There appears to have been a basic difference between the practices in Mesopotamia and Rome, whereas little is known about this aspect of divination in Greece. In Mesopotamia, there was no reason not to acknowledge such an occurrence as a divinatory sign (unless it had not been spotted).[91]

This is in contrast to official Roman practice: not every rumble of thunder was necessarily a *prodigium publicum*—there was a complicated procedure of acceptance, only some aspects of which are illuminated by the sources. However, it can be stated with confidence that not every occurrence which had previously been declared a sign, would have automatically again been accepted as a sign when it re-occurred. Although previous acceptance was important and lay at the heart of the process, other contextual and procedural factors had to be taken into account. There were a number of stages in this process: *nuntiatio* (announcement of an occurrence as a possible sign), *relatio* (reporting it to the Senate) and *susceptio* (acceptance of the occurrence as a sign by the Senate).[92] For our purposes, the most important stage is the *susceptio*, when the Senate decided whether the occurrence should be considered as a *prodigium publicum* or as *non susceptum*.[93] If the occurrence was accepted, it would be taken to signify that the *pax deorum* had been disturbed and action would usually have to be taken in the form of expiation.[94] That not all is clear to us in this procedure, especially in the *susceptio* stage, is illustrated by an example discussed in Rosenberger's book on Roman *prodigia*: in 173 BC there was a plague of locusts in the *ager Pomptinus*. This was accepted as a sign and the requisite expiations were performed. One year later, a plague of locusts afflicted Apulia. Although it appears to have been a giant plague, it is nowhere reported in the sources as sign from the supernatural.[95] Since large parts of Apulia had been confiscated after the Hannibalic War, it cannot be argued that the second plague was thought irrelevant because it had occurred outside the *ager Romanus*. We simply do not know why the second plague was (probably) rejected as a *prodigium* (*publicum*).

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[91] Which could have been on account of different circumstances, for example, prevailing bad weather conditions. See SAA 15 5.

[92] Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293.

[93] See, e.g., Liv. 43.13.6 for the use of this term.

[94] There are, of course, also situations in which the commander had to acknowledge the sign *ex-officio* and the Senate was not involved: Liv. 38.18.9.

[95] Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 29. See Liv. 42.2.5–7 and Liv. 42.10.6–7 for the two reports of locusts and the subsequent action taken.

Certainly, there were a number of formal reasons for not accepting an event as a sign. The first was the criterion of location: the Senate could decide that a sign was not a public sign because it had not taken place on *ager publicus*, but on private property, which would have left it to be dealt with by the individual, should he feel the need.[96] As Rosenberger puts it "[…] ein Zeichen musste […] in Verbinding mit einem wichtigen Ort oder einer Person im Rahmen der *res publica* stehen, um als Prodigium angenommen zu werden."[97] To illustrate this, he refers to a passage in Livy shows that two potential *prodigia* were not acknowledged because one had happened in a place belonging to a private individual, while the other had occurred in a foreign location. The first was the springing up of a palm tree, the second was when a soldier's spear had burned for two hours without being consumed.[98] Both potential portents had occurred before, but then "[…] on land or places belonging to the state or to persons in the employ of the state".[99]

Rosenberg also notes that the decision about whether or not to accept the sign could also be taken on the basis of other factors:

> In the beginning of this year [193 BC], the consulship of Lucius Cornelius and Quintus Minucius, earthquakes were reported with such frequency that people grew tired, not only of the cause itself, but of the ceremonies prescribed on that account; for the Senate could not be convened nor public business transacted, since the consuls were busy with sacrifices and rites of expiation […]. Likewise, on the recommendation of the Senate, the consuls proclaimed that on any day on which an earthquake had been reported and rites ordained, no one should report another earthquake.[100]

Livy recounts that there were so many signs—which had to be expiated, with the concomitant public disturbance—that the continuity of public life was actually affected. The Senate set a limit on the maximum number of reports of earthquakes (and hence potentially accepted signs and consequent expiations) which could occur on a single day as a measure to

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[96] Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 47.

[97] Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28.

[98] As in Liv. 43.13.6, also referred to in the discussion by Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28.

[99] Krauss, *Omens, portents, and prodigies*, 32. Cf. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28–29.

[100] Liv. 34.55.1–2; 4. Translation E.T. Sage. Principio anni quo L. Cornelius Q. Minucius consules fuerunt terrae motus ita crebri nuntiabantur ut non rei tantum ipsius sed feriarum quoque ob id indictarum homines taederet; nam neque senatus haberi neque res publica administrari poterat sacrificando expiandoque occupatis consulibus. […] Item ex auctoritate senatus consules edixerunt ne quis, quo die terrae motu nuntiato feriae indictae essent, eo die alium terrae motum nuntiaret.

obviate public disturbances. It might be argued that the Senate was trying to tighten the rules governing the recognition of earthquakes as signs—in the absence of reports of these occurrences, the Senate would, in any case, not have had to acknowledge any signs.

Third, and lastly, the Senate also had to power to discard a possible sign because there were not enough witnesses to the event and the report was therefore not deemed reliable.[101]

In a nutshell, the Roman divinatory system allowed the Senate to decide which occurrence was a *prodigium publicum*. This authority gave the Senate enormous power to influence the course of events. The magistrates and especially the *augures* had similar powers when they took and verified the *auspicia* before an undertaking. Such dominance was unparalleled in Greece and Mesopotamia, where no such decisions about the acknowledgement of an occurrence as a sign could be made by those with political power—at least not formally. Those with political clout could perhaps exert some influence on the interpretation—but this was a different matter. Ultimately, tree levels of distance between politics and divination appear. First, where politicians were *homines divinantes*—as in Rome. Those who had political power could also have religious power on account of divinatory activities. Second, where experts were structurally employed by the state—as in Mesopotamia. Still, these were two distinct circuits (which were dependent on one another). Third, as in Greece, where experts were (naturally, with exceptions) separated from political power. The exercise of political power did not lie in the hands of the Greek experts. To sum up, in Republican Rome authority over the divinatory process was differently located in the process of divination than in Greece and Mesopotamia (cf. pp. 137–138).[102]

Checking and Ignoring a Sign

After he had acknowledged an occurrence as a sign, the next step a Greek *homo divinans* would have needed to take was to interpret it and he or

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[101] Liv. 5.15.1.

[102] Cf. Parker, *Greek religion*, 44–46 who agrees that divinatory experts had no power in the process of decision making. I would add that the decision makers had no, or perhaps only occasional, power in the process of divination in Greece. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule—such as the seer Lampon also discussed by Parker. He also refers to M. Beard, 'Priesthood in the Roman Republic' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 19–48, at 42–43.

his client could make a decision according to what the sign advised.[103] Once the meaning of a sign had been found out, ignoring it was certainly unwise.[104] The arrogant leader Anaxibios did ignore the meaning of a sign from the supernatural—and this arrogance led to his death. He acknowledged this mistake at the end of his life:[105]

> Having done all these things he was not disappointed, for Anaxibius did come marching back, even though—at least, as the story ran—his sacrifices on that day had not proved favourable; but despite that fact, filled with disdainful confidence because he was proceeding through a friendly country and to a friendly city, […] "Gentlemen, it is honourable for me to die here, but do you hurry to safety before coming to close engagement with the enemy." Thus he spoke, and taking his shield from his shieldbearer, fell fighting on that spot.[106]

Roughly the same way of dealing with signs can be seen in the Roman world.[107] Individual Romans could reject a potential sign with a prayer or by spitting.[108] Rejections of potential signs by the Senate have been discussed above. However, ignoring acknowledged signs was another matter. In 217 BC Flaminius ignored signs which were unfavourable. The first sign was that his horse stumbled and fell in front of a statue of Jupiter (inherently negative)—and then he also defied unfavourable auspices. According to some sources, he was responsible for the defeat of the Roman army at the Trasimene Lake because he had ignored these signs.[109] Another example: there are accounts of Roman *haruspices* consciously ignoring the consequences of the meaning of a sign because it

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[103] Not consulting the supernatural seems to have been against Greek *mores*, at least if we trust Herodotos and Euripides on this: Hdt. 5.42; Eur. *Hipp*. 1055–1059.

[104] This idea can be seen throughout time see, e.g., Hom. *Od*. 20.350–358; Hdt. 3.124–3.125; 5.72.4; possibly 9.41.4; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 73.1; Ach. Tat. 5.3–4; in Hdt. 7.139 the Athenians are praised for ignoring an oracle which ordered them to abandon Athens when the Persians came—however, they did not actually ignore the oracle, they just chose to request a new one from the Delphic Oracle (cf. pp. 134–135). The oracle had to be accepted and acted upon: Eur. *IT* 105.

[105] Other Greek examples are Hdt. 3.124–3.125; Xen. *Cyr*. 1.6.44; Eur. *Suppl*. 155–158; 212–218.

[106] Xen. *Hell*. 4.8.36–39. Translation C.L. Brownson. ταῦτα δὲ ποιήσας οὐκ ἐψεύσθη, ἀλλ' ὁ Ἀναξίβιος ἀπεπορεύετο, ὡς μὲν ἐλέγετο, οὐδὲ τῶν ἱερῶν γεγενημένων αὐτῷ ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀλλὰ καταφρονήσας, ὅτι διὰ φιλίας τε ἐπορεύετο καὶ εἰς πόλιν φιλίαν […] Ἄνδρες, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἐνθάδε καλὸν ἀποθανεῖν· ὑμεῖς δὲ πρὶν συμμεῖξαι τοῖς πολεμίοις σπεύδετε εἰς τὴν σωτηρίαν. καὶ ταῦτ' ἔλεγε καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ὑπασπιστοῦ λαβὼν τὴν ἀσπίδα ἐν χώρᾳ αὐτοῦ μαχόμενος ἀποθνῄσκει.

[107] Not performing a ritual correctly, like in Cic. *Div*. 1.17.33, was quite another matter.

[108] Rosenberger, 'Omen'.

[109] Cic. *Div*. 1.35.77–78. For another example see Obseq. 17 in which the consul Postumius travelled to his province although a number of sacrificial victims were missing the

portended the destruction of the *haruspices* themselves.[110] By keeping the interpretation to themselves, they hoped to prevent the—for them—negative outcome. They were, however, found out. In Mesopotamian sources there is a similar account (but of a legendary nature) conveying the message that signs should not be ignored: the 'Cuthean Legend' tells us that the third-millennium King Naram Sin consulted the experts but the extispicy gave him a negative answer about going into battle.[111] He decided to disregard this, after which, according to the legend, his armies of respectively 120,000, 90,000 and 60,700 men were destroyed. All in all, the experts had to keep the guard of the king and not reporting signs would be punished because it was subversive.[112] Ignoring the signs would inexorably be punished.

Furthermore, there were cases in Mesopotamia—just as there were in the Greek and Roman worlds—of a double check being carried out after an unwanted, negative or uncertain outcome. When the second sign (or third) appeared to be positive, ignoring the first—negative—sign was regarded as justifiable. This idea is inherent in Mesopotamian extispicy.[113] It can also be found in Greece: when Xenophon received a divinatory outcome which was not to his liking, he had the option of repeating the divinatory process. The most notorious Greek literary occasion on which such a 'second opinion' was sought is that of the Athenians asking the Delphic Oracle what they should do now that the Persians were approaching. The first oracle stated that they should leave the city and save themselves. A number of Athenians did not like this outcome and proceeded to ask for a second oracle: the famous oracle of the wooden walls.[114] As Pierre Bonnechere convincingly argues, this should not be seen as a sign of mistrust but of piety: "it offered greater protection to the consultant,

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heads of the liver. Other examples of individuals ignoring signs: Cic. *Div*. 1.52.119; *Div*. 1.16.29 (these two cases are then refuted in Book 2); Liv. 25.16; 27.26.14–27.2.

[110] Obseq. 44. This is something quite different from—consciously or subconsciously—misinterpreting a sign.

[111] Standard Babylonian recension.

[112] Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 66.

[113] For the need of a check-up see, e.g., SAA 4 41 rev. 12 or see the first, second and third extispicy reports in SAA 4 43 rev. 14–24. See for a fundamental analysis of this issue Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', 43–60. A Greek example: Xen. *An*. 6.4.16.

[114] Hdt. 7.139. Another example in Eur. *Ion* 299–302; 407–409 where the oracle of Trophonios does not want to disclose any information before the oracle at Delphi has done so.

while clarifying the single truth received and investing it with additional religion [sic] authority."[115]

In short, although asking for a second sign—and subsequently ignoring the first—can be argued to have been part of asking a second opinion, ignoring a sign as such was a different matter. This was definitely something to be avoided both in Rome, in Greece and in Mesopotamia.

Why was this so? Again, the reciprocal basis of the divinatory process plays an important role. While the supernatural would continue to bestow gifts at all times, man had to accept what was handed out on account of his subordinate position in the asymmetrical relationship. Gift rejection (ignoring a sign or discarding it outright) would not only have been ignoring the supernatural: it would have been a denial of the privileged position of the supernatural in this relationship and, up to a point, even an attempt to destroy the reciprocal ties between supernatural and man. If the sign were rejected, this would have redefined the relationship between the giver and the recipient and this could only be bad news for man.[116]

Context

Context determined the meaning of the sign in Mesopotamia, where the month in which the sign occurred was considered highly significant, as were other contextual factors such as the exact day on which a sign manifested itself (context of time is further discussed on pp. 182–183) or the direction of the wind, to give just two examples from a much longer list.[117] Moreover, the combination of one sign with another could also be significant in its interpretation. One example is the following: if an animal was born with eyes on its forehead, the prince's brothers should leave both the country and the army. However, if an animal had eyes plus a bump on his forehead, the prince would enjoy a long reign, an apparently

[115] P. Bonnechere, 'Oracles and Greek mentalities: the mantic confirmations of mantic revelations' in: J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen & Y. Kuiper (eds), *Myths, martyrs, and modernity* (Leiden 2010) 115–133, at 133. For examples of the use of more than one divinatory method see Xen. *An.* 6.5.21; 6.5.2; Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.22. Signs seem to have confirmed each other in the following passages: Arr. *Anab.* 7.30; Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 13.

[116] B. Schwartz, 'The social psychology of the gift' in: A.E. Komter (ed.), *The gift: an interdisciplinary perspective* (Amsterdam 1996) 69–89, at 71; Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', 161–164.

[117] As, e.g., in SAA 10 26; SAA 10 79.

positive interpretation which might not have been expected in the light of the previous interpretation.[118]

Although this context is not as prominent in Greece and Rome, an interpretation influenced by context is found in the Etruscan brontoscopic calendar, which will have been used in Rome. It ascribed various meanings to thunder depending on the day of the year.[119] Melampos' text on birthmarks also indicates some form of context: meaning of the sign seems to depend on the gender of the person. However, these are exceptions. I would suggest that contextual elements, including the simultaneous occurrence of various signs, determined the meaning the Mesopotamian sign more so than they did in Greece and Rome. At least in theory, the Greek expert had the option of ignoring context—or perhaps everything was context in an oral divinatory culture—when interpreting a sign.[120]

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[118] Tablet 10 44' and 45' in the reconstruction by Leichty, *Šumma izbu*, 125. Mesopotamian entries in compendia always consist of a *protasis* and an *apodosis*. The first part of the sentence is the *protasis*; the latter part of the sentence the *apodosis*. The relationship between them is complicated, and can be based on such things as paronomasia, contrast, associations/wordplay, association of ideas, contrast, for example between the right and the left, upper and lower, front and rear. An example of this last category is: "if there is a hole in the head of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone among the servants in the man's household will die. If there is a hole in the middle of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone among the man's friends will die. If there is a hole in the base of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone in the man's family will die." Edition can be found in A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian omen texts* (New Haven 1947) 17:49. Translation and a discussion of the texts and the associations in Starr, *Rituals*, 9–12. Cf. Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 7–13; J. Bilbija, 'Interpreting the interpretation: protasis-apodosis-strings in the physiognomic omen series *Šumma Alamdimmû* 3.76–132' in: R.J. van der Spek (ed.), *Studies in ancient Near Eastern world view and society. Presented to Marten Stol on the occasion of his 65th birthday, 10 November 2005, and his retirement from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (Bethesda MD 2008) 19–28; F. Rochberg, '"If P, then Q": form and reasoning in Babylonian divination' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 19–27; Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 11. Greek interpretation may also, e.g., link one sign to something else, interpret by analogy or other cultural inventions (Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 65–74).

[119] For the edition and translation of the Etruscan brontoscopic calendar, translated into Latin by Figulus (note that there is uncertainty about what is 'Mesopotamian', 'Etruscan', 'Roman' or 'Byzantine' about this text): J. MacIntosch Turfa, *Divining the Etruscan world: the brontoscopic calendar and religious practice* (Cambridge 2012) 73–101. This publication provides much more background detail about the history of this text than I have space to provide here. Note that some have argued that these texts were never completely integrated into Roman religion: Latte, 'Orakel', 159–160.

[120] Although, later on, Artemidoros used context at times.

Concluding Observations

At various points in the preceding discussion, differences between the Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman ways of recognizing, acknowledging and interpreting signs have been noted. These seem to offer possibilities to probe a little more deeply by enquiring into the backgrounds of these differences.

A synthetic explanation can be achieved with the help of the concept of religious authority. In our modern perception, authority is inextricably linked to institutions. In Rome and Mesopotamia, at least the public part of divination was institutionalized, whereas these matters were organized differently in Greece. In Greek divination the individual was the bearer of authority—in this case the *homo divinans*. In Greece, the *homo divinans*—layman or expert—was the pivotal element in divination—more so than in Rome and decidedly more than in Mesopotamia: the Greek *homo divinans* chose and decided which sign should be interpreted and how. Unquestionably the Roman and Mesopotamian *homo divinans* also played a role in this decision but his part was less pronounced than that of his Greek counterpart.

The importance of the Greek *homo divinans* in the divinatory process is crucial to explaining why signs could manifest themselves in 'everything' in Mesopotamia but not in Greece nor indeed in Rome. The Greek *homo divinans* had a relatively important place in conjunction with a desire for the sign and its interpretation to be 'objective'. The need for 'objectivity' reveals a wish for the sign and divination to exist independently of man, thereby validating the outcome of divination.[121] However, on account of the weight given to the individual authority of the Greek *homo divinans*, his opinion and experience greatly influenced the interpretation of the sign (a consequence of a lack of written text, as will be discussed *in extenso* in chapter 6) and also affected its recognition and acknowledgement. The idea can be put forward that, in order to ensure the 'objectivity' of divination, the prominent role by the *homo divinans* had to be 'balanced'.[122] In

[121] Cf. p. 225.

[122] On the added 'objectivity' to the divinatory process by means of using an object, or in this case a text, thereby taking some of the recognition and interpretation of a sign away from the subjective *homo divinans* see J.J. McGraw, 'Initial draft—Mayan divination: ritual techniques of distributed cognition' in: J.P. Sørensen (ed.), *Religious ritual, cognition, and culture* (forthcoming); Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', *passim*.

other words, in Greece the 'objectivity' of the process was not ensured at the stage of selection or interpretation of a sign (in which the *homo divinans* was the decisive factor), but depended on in which manner the sign occurred: by way of natural objects. In Rome and Mesopotamia, where divination was more institutionalized, 'objective' standards had been created which meant that the interpretation of the sign was less dependent of the individual authority of the *homo divinans*. In Rome, the communal memory of earlier signs served as a touchstone, but apparently this was not enough: the sign had to occur in a natural medium. In Mesopotamia there was an equal desire for objectivity but the role of the *homo divinans* was more restricted because of the greater role accorded to the written text. This text formed an 'objective' basis of knowledge for interpretation and played a larger role than the personal experience of the *homo divinans*. Sufficient impartiality was provided by using an 'objective text' during the interpretation of the sign. Therefore, it was possible for signs to manifest themselves in the cultural world.

The scope of these inferences can be widened by focusing on the importance of context in the interpretation of signs. The fact that the context of the sign did not necessarily have to be taken into account (or was always implicitly taken into account), again, allowed the Greek *homo divinans* greater flexibility when he was interpreting.

CHAPTER SIX

PLAYING BY THE BOOK? USE OF A TEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

Written texts are the historian's bread and butter. What historian could work without the information provided by texts? However, the theme of this chapter is not the content of texts about divination, but the written and spoken texts as functional objects in all stages of the divinatory process. As the textual framework is the third essential element in the divinatory process, this needs to be investigated in order to arrive at a coherent picture of divination.

Peter Burke describes the use of investigating written texts as functional objects in the following words:

> The idea of writing [on the subject of text as a functional object] came to me while waiting for documents in an Italian archive (a process which, not infrequently, affords leisure for contemplation) together with the realization, at once intoxicating and sobering, that every document in that vast repository would be of relevance to the research. One would in a sense be interrogating the documents about themselves, rather than, as usual, about something else.[1]

Although publications focusing on written texts as functional objects in the divinatory process are noticeably few in number, this is surely a worthwhile angle of investigation when the importance of texts to the functioning of ancient religions in general and of divination specifically is considered.[2] Spoken as well as written texts were crucial to divinatory

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[1] P. Burke, 'The uses of literacy in early modern Italy' in: P. Burke & R. Porter (eds), *The social history of language* (Cambridge 1987) 21–42, at 24.

[2] Some argue that writing was central to Graeco-Roman religions, e.g., M. Beard, 'Writing and religion: ancient literacy and the function of the written word in Roman religion' in: J.H. Humphrey et al. (eds), *Literacy in the Roman world* (Ann Arbor, MI 1991) 35–58, at 37. I would go further and consider text in general (written ánd spoken) to have been central. See especially, but not exclusively, R. Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift bei den Griechen. Hieroi Logoi und verwandte Erscheinungen* (Tübingen 1998); M. Beard, 'Writing and ritual: a study of diversity and expansion in the Arval Acta', *PBSR* 53 (1981) 114–162; M. Beard, 'Documenting Roman religion' in: *La mémoire perdue: recherches sur l'administration romaine* (Rome 1998) 75–101; W. Burkert, 'Im Vorhof der Buchreligionen. Zur Rolle der Schriftlichkeit in Kulten des Altertums' in: A. Holzem (ed.), *Normieren, Tradieren, Inszenieren. Das Christentum als Buchreligion* (Darmstadt 2004) 25–39; R.L. Gordon, 'Shaping the text: innovation and authority in Graeco-Egyptian malign magic' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff et al. (eds), *Kykeon:*

practices. Both these categories will be discussed in this chapter, as far as it is possible: the spoken texts are obviously no longer available but their presence (and some ideas about their functions) can be deduced from references in written texts. It should also be borne in mind that some of the written texts will have been spoken (see Figure 3 below).

Spoken and Written

The distinction between written and spoken texts immediately raises questions about orality and literacy, which can only briefly be touched upon here. The ancient world, including Mesopotamia and all of the Mediterranean world, was 'literate' at some stage from the late fourth millennium onward. 'Literacy' is composed of many gradations and variations which have been, and are, the subject of such intense discussion that it would be impossible even to contemplate to summarize the topic of literacy in the ancient world here.[3]

Until the 1980s, many scholars operated with a neat dichotomy between oral and literate societies. During the past twenty years this approach has gradually been replaced by the idea that there was a continuum between these two types of society.[4] The new consensus is that there was a slow, uneven transition from a more oral to a more literate society, including a very long stage in which elements of both were prominent. This new

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studies in honour of H.S. Versnel (Leiden 2002) 69–111; A. Henrichs, '*Hieroi logoi* and *hierai bibloi:* the (un)written margins of the sacred in ancient Greece', *HSClPh* 101 (2003) 207–266; E. Eidinow & C. Taylor, 'Lead-letter days: writing, communication and crisis in the ancient Greek world', *CQ* 60 (2010) 30–62.

[3] Only a few recent titles out of many which might be used to access the topic: W.V. Harris, *Ancient literacy* (Cambridge, MA 1989); W.A. Johnson & H.N. Parker (eds), *Ancient literacies: the culture of reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford 2009); M.T. Larsen, 'Introduction: literacy and social complexity' in: J. Gledhill, B. Bender & M.T. Larsen (eds), *State and society: the emergence and development of social hierarchy and political centralization* (London 1988) 173–191; C. Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb in Babylonien und Assyrien: Überlegungen zur Literalität im Alten Zweistromland* (München 2000); A. Livingstone, 'Ashurbanipal: literate or not?', *ZA* 97 (2007) 98–118.

[4] A.B. Lord, *The singer of tales* (Cambridge, MA 1960) influenced the thought of Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Jack Goody and Eric Havelock who all claimed that oral and literate societies could be contrasted. A counter-movement appeared which propagated 'the literacy myth', for example, H.J. Graff, *The literacy myth: literacy and social structure in the nineteenth-century city* (New York 1979). Even those who first spoke about the 'divide' have now nuanced their statements, e.g., J. Goody, *The power of written tradition* (Washington, DC 2000) 1–25.

paradigm is based on the idea that literacy and orality are invariably intertwined and are both richly nuanced phenomena.[5]

What is literacy? Is it being able to read, write, or perhaps both? Does an individual have to be 'skilled' at it to be 'literate' or is it enough that he is able to read or write his own name? There are many levels of literacy—Niek Veldhuis distinguishes between functional, technical and scholarly literacy—and the level of literacy of the individual is surely dependent on such factors as gender, social group and location.[6] I would like to emphasize that these complicating factors, which undermine any attempt to determine even the approximate proportion of 'literate' people in the populations of Mesopotamia, Rome or Greece, are of only peripheral interest to my discussion of the use of texts in divination.[7] For the purposes of my enquiries, it is enough to note that writing has an impact on society even if only a handful of people can read or write.[8] The approach I have chosen to use is to adopt a neutral stance on the questions of whether many individuals were literate or not and the other general problems in the field of literary studies touched upon above. My goal is to explain the *uses* of written and oral texts.

Literacy transforms the way memory works as it allows memories or thoughts to be written down. Writing separates knowledge from the knowing mind and is then a very important tool for the spread of knowledge, including divinatory knowledge. The knowledge contained in a text is transformed into something which can be disseminated without requiring the physical presence of the individual who generated the knowledge.[9]

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[5] E.g., P. Koch & W. Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe—Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte', *RJb* 36 (1985) 15–43, *passim*.

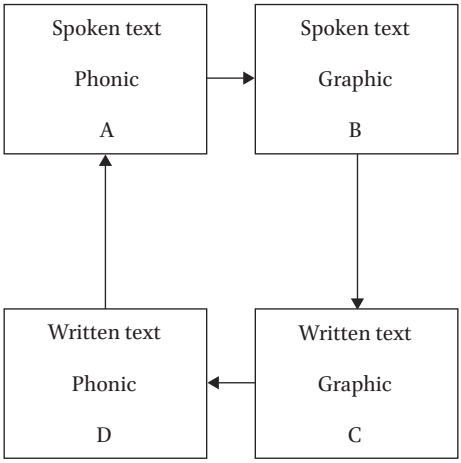
[6] N. Veldhuis, 'Levels of literacy' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 68–89, at 70–80. The experts reading compendia had, according to Veldhuis' standard, technical literacy, whereas those composing and using commentaries on compendia fall into the category of the scholarly literacy.

[7] In Greece in the Classical period a percentage of no more than 5 to 10 percent might be estimated (these individuals would have had a relatively high level of skill). The same maximum of 10 percent applies to the Roman world in the period before 100 BC. This percentage is thought to have been lower in the provinces. See Harris, *Ancient literacy*, 328–329 for these figures. For Neo-Assyrian times Veldhuis claims literacy was relatively widespread (Veldhuis, 'Levels of literacy', 68–89). Of course, there was a 'writing class' whose level of literacy was, on average, probably higher than that in the Graeco-Roman world.

[8] Beard, 'Ancient literacy', 39; see also Koch & Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe', 31–32.

[9] J. Goody & I. Watt, 'The consequences of literacy', *CSSH* 5 (1963) 304–345; J. Goody, *The domestication of the savage mind* (Cambridge 1977) *passim*.

Even when written texts play an important role after some degree of *Verschriftlichung* has taken place in a society, oral texts retain their importance. Still, whenever some measure of *Verschriftlichung* occurs in a society, and writing becomes—to a larger or smaller extent—part of everyday life, this has a profound impact, not just practically, but also intellectually and mentally. Judging from the surviving textual evidence, it seems that a certain degree of *Verschriftlichung* occurred in divinatory texts in Rome, Mesopotamia and to a smaller extent in Greece.



Based on: P. Koch & W. Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe—Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte', *RJb* 36 (1985) 15–43, at 17.

Figure 3: Written and oral

Figure 3 is a schematic illustration of the possible interactions between the spoken and the written word. To provide an example of how the diagram works: a hypothetical individual writing down a spoken question to the supernatural (for instance, on a Dodonaic *lamella*) and then revising it into another document (for instance, a commemorative stele) and later reading it out loud, would have passed through all four stages. Initially the question was purely phonic (A); when it was written down it assumed a graphic shape (B); it was then used and edited in a graphic context (C); and the written text was read out aloud, making it phonic again (D). The diagram cannot only be started at stage A: the person could begin by writing his question to the supernatural (C) and then he could continue

to read it out loud (D), and so on. In short, while a text can begin in both A and C, it can only move *through* the stages in a clockwise direction.

Types of Text

For analytical purposes, I have distinguished between three types of divinatory texts: interpretative guidelines, ritual manuals, questions and answers. Guidelines were texts instructing how a sign should be interpreted; ritual manuals prescribed how divinatory rituals should be performed; questions and answers served to document the questions to the supernatural, the signs provided to man and their interpretations. They possibly also functioned as a set of precedents. Of course, there are many more texts which reflect on some aspect of divination. However, this chapter is concerned only with texts which actually functioned *within* the divinatory process itself.[10]

These texts might function in a performative or informative way: performative texts are texts which are perceived to do or change something in the real world: they are part of an action. Informative texts describe, report or prescribe actions, including rituals—and one text can have more than one of these functions: for example, a report can be taken as proof that a particular ritual had actually been performed and it can also be used to keep a record. Its function in this case is descriptive. However, a report of this kind might also have functioned in a prescriptive sense when it served for future reference. Whether a text functioned in a prescriptive or descriptive way, or even perhaps performatively, depended on the (perceived) intentions of the author and user.

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[10] Therefore texts excluded from this investigation into text are literary texts and also the reports of the answers of the oracles inscribed on *stelae*, known from literary texts. These were not an essential part of the divinatory process but were reported and written down later (see for Delphi, e.g., Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or*. 397c which indicates that answers from the supernatural were not written down *in situ*). For examples of such texts see, e.g., Guarducci, *Epigrafia*, vol. 4, 91–97 and for Delphi Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 244–416; for Klaros (mostly late sources) R. Merkelbach & J. Stauber, 'Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros', *EpAnat* 27 (1996) 1–54; a catalogue and classification of oracles from Didyma and Klaros is by O. Oesterheld, *Göttliche Botschaften für zweifenlde Menschen: Pragmatik und Orientierungsleistung der Apollon-Orakel von Klaros und Didyma in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (Göttingen 2008) 570–612; Cf. Parke, *Oracles of Apollo*, 1–111 (Didyma); 112–170 (Klaros).

Guidelines

The category of 'interpretative guidelines' is exemplified by the Mesopotamian compendia. The Greek writings which fit this description most convincingly are the divinatory passages contained in Melampos' writings (*Peri elaion tou somatos*, divination by birthmarks, and *Peri palmon mantikes*, divination by twitches) from the third century BC and Artemidoros' dream books from Roman Asia Minor.[11] We know that earlier dream books must have existed, but the exact contents of these books are not known.[12] The Greek evidence for the existence of divinatory guidelines is very sparse indeed.[13] The Roman evidence is even sparser: the brontoscopic calendar is the best example of a Roman interpretative guideline. There is a related category of 'expiatory guidelines': for Rome the best example are the Sibylline Books. These texts could be consulted when the Senate decided the *prodigium* was accepted as a *prodigium publicum* (which had a negative meaning as it showed the *pax deorum* had been disturbed).[14] From other such guidelines, e.g., the ones the *augures* used, little is known.

The very existence of these guidelines raises questions: was there a 'right way' to interpret the signs from the supernatural? How could an individual interpret a sign in this 'right way'? Did the guidelines circulate in the form of a 'standard text' and, if they did not, were alternative divinatory textual traditions available for use? At this point, questions of authority—already touched upon in previous chapters—inescapably

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[11] Part of an edition of Melampos' works can be found in: J.G.F. Franz, *Scriptores Physiognomoniae Veteres* (Altenbug 1780). Translation by Tim Spalding (http://web.archive.org/web/20070930181352/http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/astdiv/melampus.html, visited 09-02-2009). Texts such as those described in Isoc. *Aegineticus* 19.5 and Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 27.3; Ath. 11.473b might also have been interpretative guidelines but this cannot be stated with any certainty because the contents are unknown. Artemidoros is a late source and will therefore not be extensively used in this study.

[12] Kett, *Prosopographie*, 23: Antifon (9).

[13] If the oracle collections used by the *chrēsmologoi* functioned as interpretative guidelines, this would be one more Greek example. However, we cannot be sure of the function of these texts.

[14] Cf. for Roman texts J.A North, 'Prophet and text in the third century BC' in: E. Bispham & C. Smith (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy: evidence and experience* (Edinburgh 2000) 92–107. For an introduction to the Sibylline Books see H.W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline prophecy in classical antiquity* (London 1988) *passim*; E.M. Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden 1997) 76–97; Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 3–23 and R. Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its social setting: with an introduction, translation, and commentary* (Leiden 2003) 93–123. Note that use of 'Sibylline Books' usually signifies the Graeco-Roman oracles, whereas 'Sibylline Oracles' is used when the Judeo-Christian oracles associated with the Sibyl(s) are meant.

raise their heads. The various ways in which the textual guidelines were used in Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome can also be used to identify certain differences in modes of interpretation.

Functions of the Text

Guidelines functioned descriptively in the sense that they could report such information as case studies and/or serve as a collection of past signs; they simultaneously functioned prescriptively because they detailed how a sign should be interpreted. At least in theory, divination—especially in Mesopotamia—might have meant 'reading the signs' with the help of some guideline or manual. The guidelines would have provided assistance in recognizing signs and assigning them a meaning.

One important feature of the guidelines was systematization. Unmistakably the compilers of the Mesopotamian compendia strove for a much higher level of systematization than the writers of guidelines in Greece or Rome: the compendia from Mesopotamia sketch every possibility in a systematic manner. When they did so, they did not restrict themselves just to signs which had occurred in the past but also included hypothetical ones which *might* occur.[15] The product of this thoroughness is a guideline of an almost encyclopaedic nature. For example, part of a guideline describes the various states which could affect the canopy of a house and considers the consequences of each possibility: "if a house's canopy shines inside, its inhabitant will be happy; If a house's canopy is whole inside, its inhabitant will persistently have trouble; If a house's canopy is black, its inhabitant will have trouble."[16] Then followed the red, green, gleaming, dark, quivering canopies, and so on. This does not mean that all these signs had actually occurred.

The Greek and Roman sources cannot answer questions about systematization in a satisfying way due to their scarcity (although, of course, absence of evidence is no evidence of absence): in so far as there are sources we do see some systematization in Melampos' texts: for example,

[15] On Mesopotamian compendia (with a focus on extispicy) see, among many others, N. Veldhuis, 'Reading the signs' in: H.L.J. Vanstiphout (ed.), *All those nations: cultural encounters within and with the Near East: studies presented to Han Drijvers at* [sic] *the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday by colleagues and students* (Groningen 1999) 161–174.

[16] *Šumma ālu* 6, 10–27. Edited, translated and transliterated by Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*, vol. 1, 110–113. DIŠ É *ta-ra-an-šu ina* ŠÀ-*šú* ZALAG$_2$-*ir* ŠÀ DÚR BI DÙG.GA | DIŠ É *ta-ra-an-šu ina* ŠÀ-*šú ša-lim* DÚR ŠÀ-*šu it-ta-na-an-zi-qá* | DIŠ È *ta-ra-an-šu* GI$_6$ DÚR ŠÀ-*šu ina-an-ziq*.

in the text on moles he indicates many places on the body on which one could have a mole.[17] With regard to Rome, the Etruscan brontoscopic calendar is systematic in the sense that it provides a list of days. Both this list and Melampos' text are innocent of other systematic information. Circumstantial evidence for Rome may perhaps be found in the expiatory Sibylline Books. Unfortunately very little source material remains but a supposed fragment can be found in the *Mirabilia* by Phlegon of Thralles, of which a few sentences are quoted below:

> First gather together a treasure of coin, whatever you wish, from the cities with their mingled tribes, and from yourselves, And arrange a sacrifice to be offered to Kore's mother, Demeter. Thrice nine bulls at public expense I bid you [. . .].[18]

We may assume some systematization here, but it cannot be convincingly be deducted from the sources. It should, still, be noted that the brontoscopic calendar is systematic in the sense that it goes through every day of the year.

In a nutshell, and taking into account that conclusions can only be tentative for Greece and Rome, guidelines provided a textual aid for an individual who was weighing up what occurrences he should take to be a divinatory sign (and which not), and how to interpret this sign—but the systematizing possibilities of such written texts were only fully exploited in Mesopotamia.

Accessibility

How accessible was a particular guideline? Certainly the level of literacy to be expected of individuals was important, but other factors also affected accessibility. A text might have been ritualized (and perhaps written in

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[17] It may be argued that Artemidoros' books are, up to a point, systematized (J. del Corno, 'I sogni e loro interpretazione nell'età dell'impero' in: *ANRW*, vol. 2.16, 1605–1618)—but as they are a late source we must reckon with the possibility that much had changed in Greek divination between the Hellenistic period and Artemidoros' time.

[18] Phleg. *Mir.* 10.2.12–15. Translation: W. Hansen, *Phlegon of Thralles' book of marvels* (Exeter 1996) 40. Edition: K. Brodersen, *Phlegon van Tralleis: Das Buch der Wunder* (Darmstadt 2002). Θησαυρὸν μὲν πρῶτα νομίσματος εἰς ἓν ἀθροίσας, | Ὅττι θέλεις ἀπὸ παμφύλων πόλεών τε καὶ ἀστέων, | Μητρὶ Κόρης Δήμητρι κέλευ θυσίαν προτίθεσθαι. | Αὐτὰρ δημοσίᾳ κέλομαί σε τρὶς ἐννέα ταύρους [. . .]. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 2.54.111–112. Note that there is great uncertainty about this fragment which Phlegon might have invented himself. Yet, see also Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics*, 80 n. 14. Still, this is all we have and I shall therefore use it here.

a jargon) or written in an archaic form of language. In each case these texts would have been either unintelligible or illegible to a layman, even if he were a 'literate' person: e.g., the Neo-Assyrian compendia are often full of ideograms, Sumerian signs which have been used in otherwise Akkadian texts, at a time when Sumerian had been relegated to the status of a scholarly language. Furthermore, these texts are littered with many specific terms.

1. [BE *ina bi-*]*rit* NA *u* GÍR GIŠ.TUKUL *za-qip u* ŠUB.ŠUB-*ut* SAHAR.HI.A *ki-bi-*[*is*] GÌR LÚ MUNUS.UŠ$_{11}$.ZU TI.MEŠ-*ma* DIB-*ma* GA[Z]
2. *Šumma ina birit manzāzi u padāni kakku zaqip u imtaqqut eperi kibis šēp amīli kaššaptu ilteneqqi iṣṣabbatma iddâk*[19]

The upper case letters represent Sumerian, the lower case letters represent Akkadian. The Sumerian words would have had to be translated into Akkadian by the expert: what this looks like can be seen in the second line, which is a rendition of the same text. The person able to read these texts would have had a basic knowledge of both Sumerian, the scholarly language, and of Akkadian. He would also have needed to know the appropriate technical vocabulary or jargon. In conjunction, these technical hurdles mean that the text would have been virtually inaccessible, except to those individuals who had received special training.[20]

In so far as it was used, in Rome the written language was less of a barrier because it was written using an alphabet, which required less training—and the elite will have been literate. This did not preclude difficulties: experts will have needed some specialized knowledge to access the text—an expiatory guideline such as the Sibylline Books was written in pretty esoteric (and Greek) language which was sometimes hard to grasp. This

[19] *Manzāzu* 3 line 35 as edited and translated by Koch-Westenholz in her *Babylonian liver omens*, 95. Translation: "if a Weapon sticks out and descends between the Presence and the Path: a witch will gather dust which the man's foot has trodden upon, but she will be caught and killed."

[20] On education of experts see pp. 82–87. Of course, there are exceptions. In the context of easily accessible divinatory texts, we might think of hemerologies, an example of which has been found in the temple courtyard of Nabu. See for references A. Millard, 'Only fragments from the past: the role of accident in our knowledge of the ancient Near East' in: P. Bienkowski, C. Mee & E. Slater (eds), *Writing and ancient Near Eastern society: papers in honour of Alan R. Millard* (New York 2005) 301–319, at 311.

means that also in Rome, a large section of the non-elite population was automatically excluded from direct access to these texts.

The distribution of a guideline such as the Roman brontoscopic calendar is unclear, but cannot have been very large—we know that certainly the Sibylline Books were closely guarded. In Greece, the distribution of a guideline like that of Melampos (or even Artemidoros) would not perhaps have been very large—we do not know who owned copies of it. In Mesopotamia, compendia were kept in more or less private libraries and archives and were not physically accessible for everyone to read. Access was restricted to scribes and certain people who might be called 'librarians'. A 'Geheimwissen' formula, which obliged the users not to reveal the knowledge they found in the compendia to the uninitiated, must have played an important role. It is also very doubtful whether we should think of experts actually carrying interpretative tablets about with them when they performed divination.

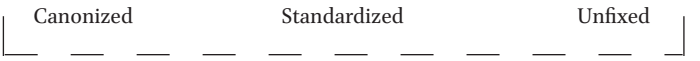
In short, in Mesopotamia and Rome access to the guidelines was restricted but they were used by experts for purposes of interpretation. It also seems reasonable to suppose that guidelines could be tools of instruction and a source of reference in cases of doubt or conflict. There is so little evidence of guidelines in Greece that it is hard to tell just how accessible they were. Potentially they were available but in practice they were probably private property. If they were circulated, they will have provided some experts with knowledge, but there is nothing to suggest that they played a central role.

Getting It Right

In the field of divination, 'getting it right' is a central problem in an emic sense. What if the message from the supernatural was misinterpreted?[21] The *homo divinans* was only human after all. Although the mere existence and theoretical availability of guidelines might have provided some sense of certainty, it also raises one pressing problem. How could an individual using a text be sure he was using the 'right text'? How did he know the text would help, rather than mislead or confuse him?

[21] Basically the problem Cicero addresses in Cic. *Div.* 2.11.28.

Theoretically speaking, guidelines could have the status of a canon, meaning that they were generally regarded as reliable and authoritative. None the less, other guidelines in a less categorical, flexible state have existed. It is possible to construct a sliding scale on which every text can be placed:



Since the contents of almost any text can be challenged, it was virtually impossible for texts to become truly canonical, except in the eyes of small groups of individuals who thought more or less dogmatically. The other side of the coin is that, if a text was utterly unfixed this could have caused confusion and, worse, discord. If some sort of consensus was to be reached about a text, it would have to be useful for a group. In practice, texts were usually neither completely canonized nor completely unfixed—they hovered, to a greater or larger extent, around the centre of this sliding scale. The first question which this poses is to what extent the divinatory guidelines in the three cultural areas were standardized. The next question is whether or not it was permissible for interpreters of signs to use a second text alongside a main divinatory guideline.

As we have seen, there is a conspicuous lack of Greek guidelines.[22] Artemidoros, the author of the most important collection of guidelines left to us—which is of course of later date and may therefore be of limited relevance for our enquiries—had definite ideas about *his* guidelines being the best option to use: he relates that his famous predecessors, who also wrote dream books, copied each other's work. They either misinterpreted older authors or failed to grasp a complete overview of the earlier source material. Some other predecessors did not know what they

[22] If we consider the oracle collections used by *chrēsmologoi* as guidelines (about which nothing definitive can be stated—they may also have functioned otherwise) we can add that there is a passage in Herodotus in which a chresmologue named Onomakritos is said to have interpolated text into existing writings (Hdt. 7.6.3). At first glance it might seem that he was not allowed to do so, but on closer inspection the *faux-pas* might not have been the act of inserting an oracle *an sich* but the fact that the contents of this oracle displeased the rulers (H.A. Shapiro, 'Oracle-mongers in Peisistratid Athens', *Kernos* 3 (1990) 335–345, at 336–337). For further comment see Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 189–192.

were writing about as they had had no practical experience of it.[23] Not averse to self-advertisement, Artemidoros claims that he—in contrast—has not only collected all the books of his predecessors but had also spoken to many knowledgeable individuals and dreamers. These two claims form the foundation of his claim to authority.[24] However, Artemidoros does not claim to be *the* authority, leaving room for alternative (but of course, in his opinion, worse) interpretations.[25] In other words, he has produced a manual which does not claim to be *the* guideline, but just a very good one which he thinks everyone should use. This implies it was possible to use one of the many other dream books which were available on a 'free market' of guidelines, written by Artemidoros' competitors. The Greek choice of text, if any, appears to have been the choice of the *homo divinans* and hence his own responsibility. When searching for information about standardization, it appears that Artemidoros knew that his text would be copied, as he warned the next generation not to alter it as this would undermine its quality. "I ask those who read my books not to add or remove anything from the present contents."[26] It could well be that, if guidelines were already used in Classical and Hellenistic Greece (and then most probably on a very small scale—we know there were books about dream interpretation) there was no single standard guideline: the text was dynamic. In so far as they existed, guidelines were locked in competition with one another and were subject to constant alteration.

In Rome, the Senate's permission was needed to insert new books or entries into the corpus of the Sibylline Books—the best example of Roman (expiatory) guidelines. Nevertheless, the Books were not regarded as irreplaceable or even as completely canonized. When the Sibylline

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[23] Artem. 1 Prooemium.

[24] He presents himself as a traveller and researcher in order to gain the confidence of his audience. Other 'persona' he uses in order to gain authority are that of warrior and doctor: Harris-McCoy, 'Artemidoros' self-presentation', 423–444. See on the way he refers to literary works, in this way emphasizing his abilities as a scholar, D. Kaspryzik, 'Belles-Lettres et science des rêves: les citations dans l'Onirocriticon d'Artémidore', *AC* 79 (2010) 17–52.

[25] E.g., Artem. 3 Prooemium. Others writing dream books were, for example, Nikostrasos (Artem. 1.2); Panyasis (Artem. 1.2; 1.64; 2.35); Apollodoros (Artem. 1.79); Apollonios (Artem. 1.32; 3.28); the supposed Astrampsychos from Graeco-Roman Egypt wrote a roughly comparable manual (Cf. E. Riess, 'Astrampsychos', *RE* 2 (Stuttgart 1894–) cols. 1796–1797; and other attestations (Macrob. *Sat.* 3.7.2; Amm. Marc. 25.2.7–8).

[26] Artem. 2.70.147–149. Translation: J.R. White, *The interpretation of dreams/Oneirocritica* (Park Ridge, NJ 1975) 137. Edition: Teubner. δέομαι δὲ τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων τοῖς βιβλίοις μήτε προσθεῖναι μήτε τι τῶν ὄντων ἀφελεῖν. Note that this was not allowed in oracle collections. However, these are a different category of divinatory text.

Books accidentally burnt in 83 BC, the Roman Senate ordered a committee to find, what its members thought were, authentic oracles and to construct a new version. The committee found existing oracles, some of them in private collections, which were also deemed (after much debate) to have come from one of the Sibyls.[27] It appears from these events that the Books were unalterable in theory only, but in practice a certain amount of improvisation was thought necessary: if the worst came to the worst, even the Sibylline Books could be replaced, closely guarded and 'secret' as they were. The approval of the Senate would provide the 'New Books' with an aura of authority comparable to that of the old ones.

The advice extracted from the Books did not necessarily need to be followed by the Senate. This body would receive an advice for action from the *decemviri* (or the augures if these were consulted) and would have to decide on how to use it: they could reject the advice.[28] Alternative texts do not seem to have played a large role. Some suggest that Livy 25.12, mentioning two prophecies of a man named Marcius, attests to the existence and use of such alternative traditions. The first of these prophecies was considered to have come true and hence great importance was ascribed to the second. After a discussion about its interpretation, a consultation of the Sibylline Books was ordered. The consultation confirmed the validity of the second prophecy, adding more information and offering ways of expiation in the process. Although it appears that the alternative tradition of Marcius could be used, the Sibylline Books were still used and referred to in order to authenticate the alternative tradition. Therefore it seems that, if the Senate chose not to use the advice offered by the Books, alternative texts were hardly ever resorted to.

Mesopotamian guidelines, it must be re-emphasized, existed in unusually large quantities. However, their quantity and unwieldy format means that the extent these texts were actually used during the execution of the divinatory process is debatable.[29] Mesopotamian compendia of ominous signs were created during the second and first millennia on the basis of previous traditions. This process was completed by Neo-Assyrian times, as shown by developments in the Old Babylonian, Middle Babylonian,

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[27] Tac. *Ann.* 6.12.

[28] Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics*, 83–84.

[29] See for this option Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 464 where Koch refers to Veldhuis, 'Theory and use', 487–497.

and Middle Assyrian copies of the compendia.[30] Standardization of these omen texts occurred "[…] in the sense that old material was conscientiously maintained in its traditional form and new material was no longer being incorporated": each compendium became a stabilized *textus receptus*. This resulted in the series in their standardized form: the *iškaru*. Nevertheless, standardized texts whose details varied could still be found in various editions in several different places.[31] The authority of these texts was based on the presumed antiquity of the texts and on their having been used from time immemorial. Sometimes the authorship was attributed to a god or a sage.[32] More importantly, as a result of their standardization through time, the series had become a text which was endorsed by the consensus of the scribal school (despite the existence of local variants and interpolations).[33]

In Neo-Assyrian times the compendia were carefully guarded: learning from, handling and copying the texts was restricted. In spite of such limitations, scribes did edit the texts and even interpolated in the process: they did not simply copy them.[34] Hence a certain dynamism in the use of the texts was a constant factor.[35] Still, a number of precautions were put in place to ensure the expert's sources as well as his mistakes or changes could be traced: in the colophon at the bottom of the tablet, the scribe wrote one of a number of standard phrases informing future readers who had copied the tablet and from which source. For example: "17 lines excerpted from (the tablet) "If a woman gives birth, and at birth the head (of the child) is already full of grey hair" Palace of Assurbanipal,

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[30] F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity in cuneiform texts', *JCS* 36 (1984) 127–144, at 127. I have already used the word standardization: this term should be used instead of 'canonization': [about other kinds of texts, but applicable to the compendia] "there was no systematic selection of works, nor was there a conscious attempt to produce authoritative works which were passed on" (W.G. Lambert, 'Ancestors, authors, and canonicity', *JCS* 11 (1957) 1–14, 9). Guidelines were subjected to standardization, not canonization.

[31] Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 128–129. Note that changes to series were sometimes consciously made: SAA 10 177 15–rev. 5.

[32] As, e.g., the text (although it is uncertain what kind of text this was, it could well have been a divinatory guideline) discussed in SAA 10 155.

[33] Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 134–137.

[34] D. Charpin, *Reading and writing in Babylon* (Cambridge, MA 2010) 198.

[35] See for an emphasis on dynamism E. Robson, 'The production and dissemination of scholarly knowledge' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 557–576, *passim.*

king of the world, king of Assyria."[36] The precaution enabled the user of this text to refer to the source from which this text had been copied.

With this standardized text in hand, theoretically all experts should have known without the shadow of a doubt how they should have interpreted any sign they might happen to come across—any uncertainties should have been eliminated because any sign and its interpretation would have been in the text. However, this ideal model does not seem to have worked in practice: as has been noted on pp. 135–136, there might still be uncertainty about the context and combination of signs and what this might mean. We also know that the guidelines were discussed and debated: there is explicit evidence of experts disagreeing about a particular interpretation.[37] In fact, it seems to have been quite normal for one and the same expert to select multiple signs and their interpretations from the compendia to explain one occurrence. After all, which sign had actually been seen?

The *iškaru* did not exist in isolation. First of all, additional commentaries were in use among experts, whose mere existence shows that experts did not always find the standardized texts unambiguous or satisfactory for their purposes.[38] The commentaries were used to elucidate obscurities in the *iškaru*.[39] An example of such an explanation drawn from a commentary can be found in a report on heavenly phenomena from the astrologer Akkullanu to the king:

> If the day [reaches its normal length]: a reign of long [days]. Normal length of a month (means) it completes the 30th day.[40]

The following is another example of a struggle with the meaning of a passage in the *iškaru*:

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[36] Colophon lines 2–3 of tablet 4, text D as published by E. Leichty. Translation: Leichty, *Šumma izbu*, 73. 17 MU.MEŠ TA ŠÀ BE SAL Ù.TU-*ma ul-la-nu-um-ma* SAG.DU-*su ši-ba-a-ti* DIR ZI-*ḫa* | KUR ^{m}AN. ŠÁR-DÙ-A MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR *Aš+šur*.

[37] E.g., SAA 10 51; SAA 10 52 6–9; SAA 10 60.

[38] For an overview of variations from standard texts and an application of the theories of Rochberg-Halton (as referred to in n. 30) in a case study not specifically about omen compendia see S.J. Lieberman, 'Canonical and official cuneiform texts: towards an understanding of Assurbanipal's personal tablet collection' in: T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard & P. Steinkeller (eds), *Lingering over words: studies in Near Eastern literature in honor of William L. Moran* (Atlanta, GA 1990) 305–336.

[39] Cf. on the explanatory commentary on this series Veldhuis, 'The theory of knowledge', 80–87.

[40] SAA 8 106 1–3. Edition and translation H. Hunger. 1 UD-*mu ana* [*mi-na-ti-šú e-ri-ik*] | BALA [UD.MEŠ] ⌜GÍD.MEŠ⌝ | ⌜*mi*⌝-*na-at* ITI UD-30-KAM *ú-šal-*⌜*lam*⌝.

> As regards the planet Venus about which the king, my lord, wrote to me: "When will you tell me (what) 'Venus is stable in the morning' (means)?", it is [writte]n as follows in the commentary: 'Venus [is stable] in the morning: (the word) "morning" (here) means [to be bright], it is shinin[g brightly], (and the expression) "[its] posi[tion is stable]" means it [rises] in the west.[41]

Other traditions were resorted to whenever the standardized *iškaru* fell short—just about the closest as one could come to a crisis in the Mesopotamian divinatory process. There were two alternative traditions: first, the *aḫû* series and second, the oral tradition of the masters (*ša pî ummâni*).

The *aḫû* series, literally the "different series" or "strange series", was used alongside a number of *iškaru*: the colophon of text E of tablet 4 of *Šumma izbu*, for example, reads "excerpted from non-canonical *Šumma Izbu*".[42] The Akkadian term translated here as 'non-canonical' is *aḫû*. As Eleanor Robson argues, at least for the series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, "[…] the term *iškaru* simply represented material from a compiled series already known to a scholarly community, while *aḫû* described similar material from parallel textual traditions that was new to them."[43] Another piece of evidence of the use of *aḫû* is to be found in a letter to the king:

> (As) the king, my lord, knows, an exorcist has to avoid reciting a 'hand-lifting' prayer on an evil day: (therefore) I shall now look up, collect and copy numerous—20 to 30—canonical and non-canonical tablets, (but) perform (the prayers) (only) tomorrow evening and on the night of the 15th day.[44]

When *aḫû* series were used to interpret a sign, reference to them was always explicit—perhaps reflecting an awareness that they might have been perceived to be less trustworthy—and their use not necessarily approved of. The following fragment is from a letter from an expert to the crown prince, in which he tries to discredit two other experts:

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[41] SAA 10 23 rev. 8–20. *ina* UGU ^{d}*Dil-bat* | *ša* LUGAL *be-li iš-pur-an-ni* | *ma-a* ^{d}*Dil-bat* | *ina še-re-e-ti i-kun* | *a-na ma-a-ti ta-qab-bi-ia* | *ki-i an-ni-i* | *ina mu-kal-lim-*⌜*ti!*⌝ [*šà*]-⌜*ṭir*⌝ | *ma-a* ^{d}*Dil-*⌜*bat*⌝ | *ina še-re-ti* [*i-kun*] | *ma-a še-*⌜*e!*⌝-[*ru na-ma-ru*] | *šá-ru-*⌜*ru!*⌝ [*na-ši-ma*] | KI!. [GUB-*sà* GI.NA] | *ina* ⌜UD!-*mu?*⌝ [*x x x*].

[42] Colophon tablet 4, text E (after line 61): ŠÀ BE iz-bu BAR-I ZI-ḫa, as published by E. Leichty. Edition and translation Leichty, *Šumma izbu*, 73.

[43] Robson, 'Scholarly knowledge', 572.

[44] SAA 10 240 20–rev. 1. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. *ep-pa-áš* LUGAL *be-lí ú-da* | ^{LÚ}MAŠ.MAŠ UD.ḪUL.GÁL.E *la* DÙG.GA | ŠU.ÍL.LÁ.KÁM *la i-na-áš-ši* | *ú-ma-a re-eš ṭup-pa-a-ni* | *ma-a'-du-ti lu* 20 *lu* 30 | SIG_5.MEŠ *a-ḫi-ú-ti* | *ú-ba-'a a-na-áš-ši-a* | *a-šaṭ-ṭar* | *ina ši-a-ri ina nu-bat-ti mu-šú.*

> Moreover, (whereas) [Aplay]a and Naṣiru have kept [in] their [hands] non-ca[nonical] tablets and [. . . s] of every possible kind, I have learned (my craft) from my (own) father.[45]

Apparently it was better and more prestigious for a son to learn the craft from his father, who is here presented as a 'better' source of knowledge than the *aḫû* tablets. Nevertheless, the colophons and letters are not enough to permit us to determine the exact relationship between the various *aḫû* series and *iškaru*. Whether *aḫû* contained materials which had been excised or excluded from the main series is not known; whether *aḫû* was just an alternative not a competing tradition to the *iškaru*; whether it was a subsidiary of the *iškaru*, which would imply a hierarchy in traditions; or whether all of the above options contain an element of truth, since they are not mutually exclusive.[46] Fragments such as the following do not exclude any of these options:

> [And concerning what the k]ing, my lord, [wrote to me]: "Let [all the omens] be e[xtracted],"—should I at the same time [copy] the [tab]let of non-canonical [omens of wh]ich [I spoke? Or should I write them] on a secondary tablet? [Wh]at is it that the king, my lord, [orders]?[47]

The current consensus is that *aḫû* were just another stream of tradition which, although it had an authoritative status, was to be used with some caution.[48]

Besides the *iškaru* and *aḫû*, there was an oral tradition about which next to nothing is known except that it was perceived to be very old and that it was differentiated from the *iškaru*:[49]

> This omen is not from the series [*Enūma Anu Enlil*]; it is from the oral tradition of the masters.[50]

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[45] SAA 10 182 rev. 24–28. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. ⌜*ù ṭup*⌝-*pa-a-ni a-*⌜*ḫu!*⌝-[*ú-ti* x x x x] | [x] *me-me-e!-ni šu!-un!-šú-nu* ⌜x x x⌝ [x x x] | [^{m}A]-a ù ^{m}*na-ṣi-ru* | [*ina qa*]-⌜*ti!*⌝-*šu-un-nu-*⌜*ma*!⌝ *uk-ti-lu* | [*a-na*]-⌜*ku*!⌝ TA*! ŠU.2 AD-*ia as-sa-am-da*.

[46] The different options are discussed in Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', *passim*.

[47] Note that some readings on this tablet are uncertain. SAA 10 101 rev. 1–6. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. [*ù ina* UGU *ša*] ⌜LUGAL⌝ *be-lí* [*iš-pur-an-ni*] | [*ma-a* x x x] *li-in-*[x x x] | [x x MU.MEŠ *a*]-⌜*ḫu*⌝-*ú-ti* ⌜*ša*⌝ [*aq-bu-u-ni*] | [x *ṭup*]-⌜*pa*⌝-*šú-nu is-se-niš* ⌜*la*⌝-[*áš-ṭu-ru*] | [*ú-la-a*] *ina ṭup-pi šá-ni-im-*⌜*ma*⌝ [*la-áš-ṭur*] | [*mi-i*]-*nu ša* LUGAL *be-lí* [*i-qab-bu-u-ni*].

[48] Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 141–144.

[49] For difficulties with the oral tradition see Y. Elman, 'Authoritative oral tradition in Neo-Assyrian scribal circles', *JANES* 7 (1975) 19–32.

[50] SAA 10 8 rev. 1–2. Edition and translation: S. Parpola. *šu-mu an-ni-u la-a ša* ÉŠ.QAR-*ma šu-u* | *ša pi-i um-ma-ni šu-ú*.

Simo Parpola speculates that there were oral traditions in Mesopotamian 'wisdom' (not restricted to divination), which were secret and were transmitted orally from father to son.[51] The letter to the crown prince, as cited above, might be interpreted as referring precisely to such a source of knowledge. However, the ancient origin of the oral tradition can be disputed: it is impossible to exclude the likelihood that an expert might have invented his own interpretation, even though there were standard texts available, and, to give it weight, ascribed it to some ancient tradition or other.[52] An example of the use of alternative traditions is the following fragment of a letter of the astrologer Balaṣi to the king:

> This night a star stood [in] the head of Scorpius in front of the moon. The omen from it does not portend anything (bad), it will not [alt: could not] be excerpted at all.[53]

Balaṣi continues by giving the interpretation of the sign according to the oral traditions or perhaps from a commentary:[54]

> If the Obsidian star (and) Antares, which stand in the br[east] of Sc[orpius, s]tood in front of the moon, this is a normal sign.[55]

In short, the use of alternatives alongside a standardized text seems to have been regarded as acceptable, although the use of an alternative is always emphatically mentioned.[56]

The mere existence and use of written text was important in Mesopotamia because it made it possible to achieve 'objectivity' in interpreting the sign. Texts (including alternatives) provided a way to 'get it right'. Mesopotamians would create additions to their existing, highly systematized

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[51] S. Parpola, 'Mesopotamian astrology and astronomy as domains of the Mesopotamian wisdom' in: H.D. Galter (ed.), *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens: Beiträge zum 3. Grazer Morgenländischen Symposion (23.–27. September 1991)* (Graz 1993) 47–59, at 57.

[52] Something which was sure to give a text authority: SAA 10 155 (a letter written to the king by an astrologer—it is uncertain if it is concerned with a divinatory guideline but this is quite possible).

[53] SAA 8 98 7–rev. 3. Edition and translation: H. Hunger. *i-na mu-ši an-ni-i-e kak-ka-bu* | [*ina*] SAG.DU *ša* MUL.GÍR.TAB | *ina* IGI ^{d}30 *it-ti-ti-iz* | GISKIM-*šú la i-lap-pa*-[*at*] | *la-áš-šú la in-na-sa*-[*ḫa*].

[54] Personal communication U.S. Koch, spring 2009.

[55] SAA 8 98 rev. 4–7. Edition and translation: H. Hunger. *šum-ma* MUL.*ṣur-ru* MUL.LI$_9$.SI$_4$ *ša* ⌜GABA⌝ | *ša* MUL.[GÍR.TAB] ⌜*iz*⌝-*za-zu*-[*u-ni*] | *ina* IGI ^{d}30 [*it*]-*ti-ti*-[*su*] | *šu-u* GISKIM *ka-a-a-ma-nu*.

[56] Cf. A. Winitzer, 'Writing and Mesopotamian divination: the case of alternative interpretation', *JCS* 63 (2011) 77–94.

interpretative texts. In Rome, the written textual aspect of divination does not appear to have received much attention. Still, it seems that the state-controlled Sibylline Books enshrined a standardized text which was in theory unchangeable and verged on the canonical. In practice, however, this text could be altered, supplemented or even replaced should the need arise. Written guidelines played a far less prominent role in the interpretation of signs in Greece. Yet, in so far as guidelines were used, new ones could be created—quite possibly on the basis of an older one—which suited the needs of their users. If Artemidoros shows us anything about how this may have occurred in earlier times, he shows us a Greek world in which the few available guidelines were constantly copied, pasted and changed. If texts were used to 'get it right', a large amount of leeway was permitted.

Ritual Scenario

The Mesopotamian *ikribu* is a prayer-cum-ritual text which was used during rituals to evoke the signs: this was what was pronounced during the evocation of a sign in extispicy.[57] The extispicy ritual was stretched out over a long period of time: it commenced before sunset and continued throughout the night until it was day again. At each stage of the ritual, a particular part of the *ikribu* had to be recited, providing a commentary on the ritual being performed simultaneously with the recitation. The spoken words were an integral part of the ritual—they had to be pronounced to facilitate the appearance of a sign and were integrated into the ritual.[58] The *ikribu* functioned as an informative prescriptive guideline for the performance and could be a self-referent text.[59]

The Mesopotamian *ikribu* has no convincing parallel in Greece. Perhaps texts such as sacred laws come closest, but they merely list certain rituals to be performed without giving a detailed scenario and without

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[57] Published (although outdated) in: H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion: die Beschwörungstafeln Šurpu: Ritualtafeln für den Wahrsager, Beschwörer und Sänger* (Leipzig 1901).

[58] See Lenzi, *Akkadian prayers and hymns*, 46–49 for an introduction to this genre of texts.

[59] For such a text related to divination see the (Old Babylonian) 'sacrificial manual' published in D.A. Foxvog, 'A manual of sacrificial procedure' in: H. Behrens, D. Loding & M.T. Roth, *DUMU-E_2-DUB-BA-A: studies in honor of Åke W. Sjöberg* (Philadelphia 1989) 167–176; Zimmern, *Beiträge*, 96ff.

specifying the formulas to be recited.[60] For Rome, we know that there were performative texts for ritual prayers, but it is unsure if they referred to divinatory practice.[61] Naturally, the possibility that the Greek or Roman scenario texts or other self-referent texts about divination have been lost or were transmitted orally should be taken into account. The Graeco-Egyptian parallel of the *PGM* allows us to consider the option that there were indeed Greek scenarios written on papyrus, now lost. Scenario texts, which are known to have been used in Roman religion, could have been recorded in the Roman 'magical' books burned by Augustus. It is also known that in expiatory rituals it was incumbent on the priest or *decemvir* to pronounce the correct words (with the help of a written text?), after which the others present would repeat these after him so that they would be saying the formula 'correctly'. Some have argued that ancient religion (but, admittedly, specifically in the Greek world) "favors the *dromena* over the *legomena* [...]" for a number of rituals of everyday life: these were, supposedly, "action-oriented rituals".[62] This is a rather bold statement and cannot be affirmed with certainty in the ritual of divination.

Questions (and Answers)

Another category of texts consists of questions addressed to, and the perceived answers received from, the supernatural. Strictly speaking, the answers are the result—and not a part of—the divinatory process. However, as will be discussed, questions and answers cannot always be physically separated—and therefore the answers are included in this discussion.

Questions to the supernatural were by definition in the form of a human text—whether written or oral. For example, at the oracle at Dodona the

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[60] A sacred law could of course have been referred to during the ritual, but this was a different matter.

[61] J. Scheid, 'Oral tradition and written tradition in the formation of sacred law in Rome' in: C. Ando & J. Rüpke, *Religion and law in Classical and Christian Rome* (Stuttgart 2006) 14–33, at 18.

[62] A. Henrichs, 'Drama and *dromena*: bloodshed, violence, and sacrificial metaphor in Euripides', *HSClPh* 100 (2002) 173–188, at 176. See also A. Henrichs, '*Dromena* und *legomena*: zum rituellen Selbstverständnis der Griechen' in: F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart 1998) 33–71, *passim*. For example, lamentation, supplication or solemn curses were represented by both words and actions, whereas sacrifice and libations can be considered 'non-verbal and action-oriented rituals' (Henrichs, 'Drama and *dromena*', 176).

auditory signs must have been put into the shape of understandable text by an intermediary.[63] With regard to Delphi there is a discussion about whether or not the Pythia, in her role of mouthpiece of the supernatural, spoke goobledegook or in perfect hexameters. I follow those who think the Pythia needed an interpreter who translated her spoken signs into an understandable text.

Questions addressed to the supernatural could be asked orally. These questions and answers were sometimes only remembered and discussed orally but some were written down later (sometimes with their answers) and so on. This raises concern about the function of these written questions in the divinatory process and the identity of the reader or readers for whom they were written.

In Mesopotamia there are two specific genres of texts which are potentially useful in a discussion of these issues: the Assyrian extispicy queries and the Babylonian *tamītu*s. Investigation of the queries is more useful to our purpose, since they are known to have been used in the context of divination. Probably, *tamītu*s were not used during the ritual itself: instead they very much resemble administrative blueprints of the questions—'archival copies'.[64] Although these texts are, then, a related genre, the queries addressed to the sun god do shed light on the function of this kind of texts *within* the Mesopotamian divinatory process—the 'working copies'.[65] The following is an example of a query:

> [Šamaš, great lord, give m]e a firm [positive answ]er [to what I am asking you]! [Should Šamaš-šumu-ukin, son of Esarhad]don, king of [Assyria, within this year] seize the [han]d of the great lord [Marduk i]n the Inner City, and should he lead [Bel] to Babylon? Is it pleasing to your [great] divinity and to the great lord, Marduk? Is it acceptable to your great divinity and to the great lord Marduk? Does your great divinity know it? [Is it decreed] and confirmed [in] a favorable case, by the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord? Will he who can see, see it? Will he who can hear, hear

[63] On the voice of the supernatural see: S. Georgoudi, 'Des sons, des signes et des paroles: la divination à l'œuvre dans l'oracle de Dodone' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 55–90.

[64] Cf. Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 1–20 for an introduction as well as Lenzi, *Akkadian prayers and hymns*, 52–53 for an introduction and an excursus on how the *tamītu* differ from the queries.

[65] The main publications of these texts are J.A. Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an der Sonnengott* 2 vols (Leipzig 1893); E. Klauber, *Politisch-religiöse Texte aus der Sargonidenzeit* (Leipzig 1913); I. Starr, *Queries to the sungod: divination and politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4) (Helsinki 1990).

> it? [Disregard the (formulation) of today's case], be it good, be it faulty, (and that) the day is overcast and it is raining.[66]

What was the purpose of these texts? Analysis of the handwriting suggests that the queries were compiled before and during the divinatory process. The query consisted of three parts: the actual question, the *ezib* (the 'disregard-clauses' where the expert asks the supernatural to overlook any mistakes) and the proposed time frame for which the extispicy would be valid. These were probably prepared beforehand. Jussi Aro puts it as follows: "it seems that the tablet was prepared before the ceremony and laid before the god [. . .]. After the ceremony the omens obtained were added on to the tablet in an empty space left either before the last concluding sentence or after it; sometimes they are lacking altogether."[67] This last part of the query could be written by a scribe, either actually during the extispicy process or perhaps shortly afterwards from notes jotted down during the process.[68] Afterwards, the query (including the signs) could be used to produce a report, which could either be sent to the king or kept as an archival copy.

The presence of the query *during* the divinatory process is the crucial point. It was 'laid before the god', in the words of Aro. What does this mean? What were men or the supernatural supposed to do with this written text? Its presence during the ritual must have served some purpose: either as an *aide-mémoire* for the *homo divinans*, helping him to ask the right question or as an essential feature of the divinatory process because it was thought appropriate to record questions addressed to the supernatural in writing—or perhaps the writing was necessary for the supernatural to read the questions.

There is no body of written questions known from Rome (although there are reports and individual enquiries, no series of direct questions to the supernatural survives). From Greece there are many literary reports of

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[66] SAA 4 262 1–11. Edition and translation: I. Starr. [^{d}UTU EN GAL-*ú šá a-šal-lu-ka an*]-⌜*na*⌝ GI.NA *a*-[*pal-an-ni*] | [^{md}GIŠ.NU$_{11}$—MU—GI.NA DUMU ^{md}*aš-šur*—ŠEŠ—⌜SUM⌝-*na* LUGAL ⌜KUR⌝— [*aš-šur*^{KI}] | [*i-na* ŠÀ MU.AN.NA NE-*ti qa*]-⌜*at*⌝ EN GAL-*i* ^{d}[AMAR.UTU] | [*i*]-⌜*na*⌝ ŠÀ-*bi*—URU.KI *li-iṣ-bat-ma a-na i-na pa-*⌜*an*⌝ [^{d}EN] | *a-na* KÁ.DINGIR.RA^{KI} *lil-lik* UGU DINGIR-*ti-ka* [GAL-*ti*] | *ù* UGU ^{d}EN GAL-*i* ^{d}AMAR.UTU DÙG.GA | *pa-an* DINGIR-*ti-ka* GAL-*ti ù pa-an* ^{d}EN GAL-*i* | [^{d}]AMAR.UTU *ma-ḫi-i-ri* DINGIR-*ut-ka* GAL-*ti* ZU-*e* | [*i-na*] SILIM-*tim i-na* KA DINGIR-⌜*ti*⌝-*ka* GAL-*ti* ^{d}UTU EN GAL-*ú* | [*qa-bi*]-*i ku-un* IGI-*ra* IGI-*mar še-mu-ú* ŠE-*e* | [*e-zib šá di-in* UD-*me*] NE-*i* GIM DÙG.GA GIM *ḫa-ṭu-ú* UD ŠÚ-*pu* A.AN ŠUR.

[67] Aro, 'Remarks on the practice of extispicy', 110.

[68] See further on use and background of the queries: Klauber, *Politisch-religiöse Texte*, i–xxv; Starr, *Queries*, i–lxxviii.

the questions asked during the divinatory process, as well as one extensive epigraphic corpus: the Dodonaic tablets.[69] While there are other, smaller, epigraphic corpora related to divination, this corpus will be discussed extensively, as it is the only evidence from the Greek world which matches the Mesopotamian extispicy queries. Were these texts, like the queries, open to be 'read' by anyone, human or divine? What was the Greek question supposed to do? Bearing in mind that the corpus from Dodona might not be representative of all of Greek divination, nevertheless a discussion of the corpus does shed more light on the role of text in divination.

The questions addressed to the oracle were written down on small strips of lead; in some cases an answer from the oracle can be found on the back of the strip.[70] Many of the leaden strips were found still rolled up. Around two hundred of these texts have been published so

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[69] There are also collections of oracles like the oracles of Orpheus, for example, but these were used by chresmologues. Although these can be seen as 'answers' or at least as auditory signs from the supernatural—there is uncertainty about the authenticity of the collections. See further on collections of oracles Burkert, 'Divination', 39–41; Latte, 'Orakel', 175–176.

[70] Unfortunately, the number of surviving answers is small. For this reason it has to be assumed that answers were usually passed on to the client orally by the functionaries at the oracle site (Lhôte 12; 27; 35; 68; 92; 99?; 114; 137. Note that those texts Lhôte considers possible answers, but with strict reservations, have been left out here). Answers have been conveniently listed by Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 123–124. She mentions 12 to 15 answers (if fragmentary or doubtful cases are included the high count of 15 should be adhered to, otherwise the low count is the best option). See for another, contrasting, source which indicates that answers were written down: Soph. *Trach*. 1166–1168. Another possibility is that answers were not usually provided on the back of the tablet but perhaps on some other, perishable material. Nevertheless, on the basis of the materials available, it has to be concluded that text apparently did not play an important role in recording answers from the supernatural (this is also confirmed from other sites, such as Delphi, where the oracles were not written down as far as is known). Note that L.H. Jeffrey, *The local scripts of archaic Greece: a study of the origin of the Greek alphabet and its development from the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C.* (Oxford 1990^2) 100 claims that oracles were written down on leather at Delphi. We find a similar idea in Cic. *Div*. 2.55.115. The few answers we have are all about different topics and are phrased differently. There is no apparent reason why these specific answers were written down, and others not. It seems to have happened in the fifth and fourth centuries, but there is not enough evidence to draw any conclusions about changing practices (all dates by Lhôte: Lhôte 12 (425–400); 27 (fifth century); 35 (450–425); 68 (ca 350); 92 (fourth century); 99? (ca 450); 114 (400–390); 137 (fourth-third centuries). The answers listed in Eidinow are from the same period: page 123: 1) 330–320; 2) ? 3) Travel 5: c. 400 4) Travel 22: fifth century 5) Women 20: mid-fourth century 6) Work 13: ? 7) Slavery 4: fifth century 8) Slavery 12: beginning of fourth century 9) Health/Disease 6: ? 10) Property 2: fifth century 11) Prosperity/Safety 4: mistake in Eidinow, this is not an answer 12) Prosperity/Safety 5: fourth century 13) Military Campaigns 1: first quarter of fourth century 14) City affairs and politics 2: ? 15) Fragmentary 9: ?).

far. Many more (ca 1,100) await publication.[71] The published texts range in date from 550 to 167 BC.[72] Some examples are the following:

- Whether it will be better for me if I go to Sybaris and if I do these things?[73]
- Will it be better for Agelochos (from Ergetion) if he sets out to be a farmer?[74]
- God. Good fortune. About the price of a slave.[75]
- God. Luck. Leontios asks about his son Leon, whether he will be healthy and (cured) of the disease which has gripped him?[76]

Answers were only occasionally written down on the tablets:

> Side A: God . . . Good Luck. About possessions and about a place to live: whether (it would be) better for him and his children and his wife in Kroton?
>
> Side B (probably the response to A): In Kroton.[77]

Textual (Un)certainties

How the oracle at Dodona functioned is still largely shrouded in mystery.[78] Nevertheless, enough is known to sketch a hypothetical scenario: a client

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[71] Most of the available *lamellae* have recently been (re-)published in Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires, passim*; M. Dieterle provides an overview but no publications: M. Dieterle, *Dodona: Religionsgeschichtliche und historische Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des Zeus-Heiligtums* (Hildesheim 2007) 70–72; 345–360; Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 72–124 has categorized the published oracles.

[72] Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 11. We know that the oracle at Dodona already existed in some form when the Odyssey was written down: Hom. *Od.* 14.327–330.

[73] Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 75 (number 2). Ạἴ κα μέλλι ἐς [Σύ]βαριν ἰόντι λόϊον | ἔμεν [κ]α πράτοντι ταῦτα.

[74] Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 96 (number 4). Ἀγελόχῳ ἐξ | Ηεργετίω *ho* | ρμημένωι | ἄμεινόν ἐστι | γαοργῆ[ν].

[75] Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 103 (number 10). Θεὸς τύχαν ἀ[γαθάν· περὶ ἀνθρ] | ώπου τιμᾶς.

[76] Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 105 (number 3). Θεός . τύχα . ἱστορεῖ Λεόντιος περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ | Λεόντος ἦ ἐσσεται ὑγεία τοῦ νοσήμα- | τος τοῦ ἐπιμ . . . του ὅ λάζεταί νιν.

Note that questions about children were very frequently asked, but had more to do with the begetting of children than anything else. This is attested by Dodonaic epigraphical evidence but also by literary sources on Delphi such as Eur. *Med.* 668–669.

[77] Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 76 (number 5). Side A: Θεός· τύχα ἀγαθά · | περὶ πανπασίας καὶ περὶ ϝοικέσιος | ἰς Κρ<ό>τονα ἔ βέλτιον καὶ ἄμεινο<ν> | αὐτοῖ καὶ γενε- | ᾶι καὶ γυναι- | κί.

Side B: Ἦν Κρότονι.

[78] It seems that the oracle at Dodona worked in such a way that an immediate answer through visual or auditory signs would have been possible, although there were group proceedings as well which might have taken longer.

would arrive and be provided with a piece of lead. He (or she) would write down the question and fold the tablet. If the client had trouble writing, he would ask someone else—either another client or perhaps an employee at the oracle. Yet, analysis of the handwriting reveals that the clients usually wrote down their own questions on the small lead tablets in Greek.[79] The hypothesis that the client wrote his tablet at Dodona itself appears plausible, especially in combination with the archaeological evidence of the presence of putative writing materials and the (incidental) presence of scribes or writing functionaries at the sanctuary, who would have been on hand to help the people write their lead tags and instruct them on the format of the questions.

Although these inferences are relatively straightforward, one crucial uncertainty looms: from an emic perspective, the supernatural had to be informed of the questions which were asked. Yet, in some way that the functionaries present at the site also needed to get know the questions.

Were the functionaries (or the clients themselves) supposed to read out these texts for the supernatural publicly so that the supernatural could 'hear' them—also providing the functionary with knowledge of what the question was about? This first option is supported by the fact that there are no significant traces of symbolic writing on the tablets. The questions are relatively well written and lucid.[80]

A second option is that the *lamella* remained rolled up: the supernatural was supposed to 'read' the question from the closed *lamella*. The presiding functionary at the oracle site would have had to ask or open the *lamella* secretly in order to find out what the question was—after all, he would have needed to provide an appropriate answer.[81] This is suggested by one of the tablets (Lhôte 35), which seems to make it explicit that the writing was not intended for man, but only for the supernatural: the tablet appears to have been folded open, engraved with an additional word on the back of the folded tablet, possibly by a functionary in order to clarify

[79] Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 329–335. The texts also had to be written in Greek, although there are some peculiarities whenever an Illyrian language is used and also when a demotic Egyptian sign appears on one of the tablets. See the commentaries on tablets 164 and 129 by Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 319–322; 266–271.

[80] Every text is in Greek and conveying a question. When used symbolically, writing is a part of religious symbolism: it is not intended to be consulted (Beard, 'Ancient literacy', *passim*).

[81] This is not to say this was fraud or manipulative behaviour: it is perfectly reasonable to assume, if the procedure worked in this way, the functionary would have convinced himself that he had conveyed the true sense of the sign he had perceived.

the (vague) question, and then refolded so that it would appear it had not been opened.[82]

There are indications that written questions were used at other Greek oracle sites as well.[83] These might provide insight into the uncertainties in the ways these texts functioned at Dodona. At Korope, the procedure around 100 BC was as follows: a procession consisting of officials was conducted towards the oracle. When they had arrived, they sacrificed; following this, the secretary wrote down the names of the enquirers wanting to pose their questions on a public board; after they had been seated the individuals were called up before the officials and handed them their tablets; these tablets went into a jar which was kept in the sanctuary overnight; the following day the tablets were returned to the individuals, presumably with the answer. Louis Robert has argued that the procedure was already completed on the first day but that there would have been no time to hand the tablets back to the enquirers in the evening. He suggests this is why it was necessary to wait until the following day.[84] Others have argued there must have been a purpose in delaying handing back the tablets: otherwise it would be a waste of time. Parke suggests that human incubation might have taken place overnight, as was the case at the oracle of Mallos. If we accept this theory, returning the tablets "[. . .] was presumably meant to allow them [the clients] to satisfy themselves that their questions had not been opened or read by any human agent."[85] Although the possibility of a nocturnal incubation as part of the proceedings at Korope should not be shrugged aside, another possibility might have been that the questions were read by officials overnight, which would have allowed them to provide a suitable answer the next morning. Of course, the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

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[82] Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 95–97; 354–355. Judging from handwriting, the few answers available to us were written down by people other than those who wrote down the questions. Lhôte 127, 35, 12, 92 have answers written on the back which are not in the handwriting of the person who wrote down the questions. The handwriting in the answer of 35 is in the same handwriting as an addition made on the back of the tablet, also indicating the work of a professional who regulated the proceedings at the site. The answers might have been written by professionals at the sanctuary. On another tablet, tablet 95, however, the same handwriting is seen both front and back: in this case. On the basis of the use of the local dialect, the client or professional seems to have inscribed both the answer and the question. Consider also numbers 142; 166 and 68 in this context. See Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 356–357.

[83] Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 102–103.

[84] Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 25–26; O. Stählin, *RE* 11 (1921) s.v. Korope 1.

[85] Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 107.

One Graeco-Roman oracle at which the questions were submitted in written form was the oracle of Alexandros of Abonuteichos in the second century AD.[86] Although much later in time, at the oracle of Alexandros the proceedings were as follows: first, the client had to write his question down on a small piece of paper and seal it so it could not be opened. Alexandros took all the papers inside and had the clients called in one at the time so they could be given back their paper, seal unbroken; the answer was written on the outside of the paper.[87] In between these sessions, he would, fraud that he was, have read the papers.[88] This may be seen as a reflection on the doubts about what was done with the 'secret' questions: they were not meant to be read by man, but in practice they were.

I would tentatively argue that, from an emic perspective, the Dodonaic questions were intended for the supernatural to read 'in private'—without any functionary interfering, thereby validating the procedure—, but that they served the functionaries in practice. This twofold and contrasting use of text will have created tensions—which can be detected in the sources.

A Function in the Afterlife (of the Text)?

What was done with divinatory questions after their use? Were written questions and answers archived, abandoned or left behind at the oracle? Were they perhaps re-used? Mesopotamian questions were certainly kept, along with the report of the sign which had been seen. This served as a record of the consultation and was also used for training purposes and for future reference. How did this work in Greece? Again, Dodona can serve as a point of departure.

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[86] For an analysis of Lucian's satirical topics see, e.g., C.P. Jones, *Culture and society in Lucian* (Cambridge, MA 1986) 133–148. On historicity of Lucian's Alexandros see U. Victor, *Lukian von Samosata: Alexandros oder den Lügenprophet* (Leiden 1997) 8–26 and, more critically, Bendlin, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil'. The way Alexandros built his oracular empire and how he won a niche in the market is discussed in G. Sfameni Gasparro, 'Alessandro di Abonutico, lo "pseudo-propheta" overro come costruirsi un'identità religiosa. II. L'oracolo e I misteri' in: C. Bonnet & A. Motte (eds), *Les syncrétismes religieux dans le monde méditerranéen antique: actes du colloque international en l'honneur de Franz Cumont à l'occasion du cinquantième anniversaire de sa mort: Rome, Academia Belgica, 25–27 septembre 1997* (Brussels 1999) 275–305.

[87] Lucian *Alex*. 19. Lucian claims Alexandros would break the seal, read the question and re-seal the document by means of trickery (Lucian *Alex*. 20) as discussed in Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 107–108.

[88] Note that there would also have been oral questions: Lucian *Alex*. 26–27.

The first Dodonaic tablets excavated were found by Constantin Carapanos in the temple area: "un grand nombre d'exvoto en bronze [...] et la plupart des inscriptions sur plaques de bronze et de plomb, ont été trouvés, éparpillés dans ces ruines, à une profondeur de 5 metres environ."[89] If this report can be trusted—which is the consensus—a number of inferences can be drawn from it. The fact that the tablets were found, many rolled up, scattered across the site suggests that the tablets were taken by the client and buried *in situ* in obedience to some preordained prescription, or were simply discarded.[90] The latter case seems more plausible.

If the tablets were discarded or collected but without the specific purpose of creating an archive, some might have been picked up again and re-used. These would have been gathered, smoothed out, erased and prepared for re-use. This possibility is supported by some palimpsests and opisthographs (when the other side of a tablet is used to inscribe a new question).[91] These various clues suggest that, after use, the *lamellae* were no longer of use either to the client or to the oracle site. If the functionaries at Dodona had collected and perhaps archived the tablets, they would not have ended up scattered over the length and breadth of the site.

The tablet then also lost its value for the oracle site itself: besides the small number of tablets which were re-used there is no evidence that the used tablets were ever looked at again. It certainly seems that questions (and records of answers) at the oracle were not centrally administered—going on the evidence available. This is peculiar because an archive could surely have been a way for the oracle to gain and retain authority, simply by giving it a history.[92]

Although Dodona was an institutionalized oracle and could have set up an infrastructure for the purpose of keeping a record of the questions which had been asked, perhaps for future reference, this was—apparently—not deemed necessary. Why not? The answer ties in with conclusions above: the questions were written down for the benefit of the supernatural. The

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[89] C. Carapanos, *Dodone et ses ruines* vol. 1 (Paris 1878) 19.

[90] Some seem to suggest that the *lamellae* were buried, like *defixiones*. However, I see no reason for this and it would not tie in oracular practices elsewhere.

[91] For palimpsests and opistographs (of which some are questions and answers and others seem to have a question on each side) see, e.g., Lhôte numbers 10, 22, 36, 42, 46, 49, 50, 53, 58, 81, 89, 133, 137 (?), 141. Cf. Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 108.

[92] Alexandros of Abonuteichos, for example, is said to have kept an archive of the oracles given at his oracle so that there would be records from which he could in retrospect be seen to have given the 'right' oracle. This may have then also occurred in practice. See Lucian *Alex*. 27.

supernatural needed no record or proof of the interpretation of the sign it had provided. Nor was the text necessary for man: he knew his question and a yes-or-no answer is of course easily remembered. In important cases, the answer was later inscribed on a stele. In general, however, no need was felt either to solidify 'the word of the gods' for man by means of writing it down or to keep a record by means of an archive.[93] No bureaucratic apparatus was set up for either of these purposes—nor is this seen at other oracle sites (although Didyma might be an exception). There are, of course, epigraphical reports of answers of the supernatural—but these are generally written down by and in the *poleis* who had consulted oracles. This oral tradition is in striking contrast to Mesopotamia, where the text served both the supernatural and man—during *and after* the process to serve as an archive as well as being a basis for reports to the king.

Concluding Observations

The most striking difference between the three cultural areas is the widespread use of informative written texts during Mesopotamian divination and the apparently relatively low frequency of use of such texts in Greece. There are more Roman than Greek texts, but in comparison to Mesopotamia the amount of Roman texts is small.

The extensive use of written informative texts in Mesopotamia shows the apparent necessity for use of the written word as part of the Mesopotamian divinatory ritual—as does the use of text in Rome (although much less so due to the lower frequency of the texts). The dearth of written

[93] It seems that the oracle at Dodona worked in such a way that an immediate answer was possible, although there was a sequence of proceedings as well which might have taken longer. In practice the question had to be written down because the functionary needed to read it, but the writing was primarily meant for the supernatural. The functionary might perhaps have read it in private, so that the individual would remain under the impression that the supernatural had read the question and provided the answer. The functionary would also have needed to re-fold the tablet to give the impression he had not read it, which would explain the many folded tablets which were found at the site. Especially one instance in which a yes-or-no answer would not have done, this would not have been known before opening the tablet. Unless the client had been asked, the functionary would have needed to open the tablet for the client to have received an appropriate answer. As far as the individual was concerned the tablets were—and remained—folded because the supernatural knew what the question inside them was anyway. The answers were not written down and it must be assumed that the reason was that this act was not perceived to have added anything to the oracular proceedings.

divinatory texts in Greece supports the view that we are dealing with an under-institutionalized, decentralized, predominantly oral divinatory culture—albeit with a number of exceptions, such as the few guidelines we have and the written questions addressed to the supernatural at certain oracles. This created a situation in which a great variety in meaning could be given to the signs from the supernatural because the interpretation was not solidified in the shape of text, but it also meant that a much heavier burden was placed on the skills of the *homo divinans*. This might suggest, to some extent at least, that the *homo divinans* was regarded with a relatively greater degree of suspicion in Greece than in Mesopotamia: in many cases there would have been no way to verify the Greek *homo divinans'* findings against an agreed standard.

In addition to the frequency of the use of written text, the variety in the use and function of these texts is another conspicuous feature, illustrating the wide diversity in divinatory practice in the three cultural areas. The first fact which emerges from the discussion is that in all three cultural areas a guideline could be more or less standardized and assume some degree of authority, usually because this had been agreed upon by one or more experts. In theory, the authoritative written text was the standard text which should be used (at least according to the experts). In practice matters seem to have been organized rather differently in each of the three cultural areas. If the guideline did not seem to work and the expert needed to resort to an supplementary one, or another, completely different one, he could discard or supplement the standardized text and another written or oral tradition would have been sought, found and used. There seems to have been nothing problematic about this procedure: it was a matter of practicalities. Practicalities which were different in each of the three areas: on the basis of the scanty written evidence from Greece it does appear that a new written text would be created if the old one did not suit the requirements of the experts. Once produced, these texts would enter into competition with one another. Romans tried to hold on to their old texts by adding to them (or even replacing them but under the same name), keeping the established tradition going at least theoretically, while in Mesopotamia a new written text would be produced to be used side-by-side with the old text as an extension of the corpus.

These guidelines, standards and alternatives were created to facilitate the task of interpreting the signs of the supernatural in the right manner. They were both descriptive and prescriptive. Ultimately, in each area the *homo divinans* had the last say on how and according to which written

text a sign should be interpreted. The degree to which he was free to do so depended on the conventions governing the use of guidelines.[94]

Second, there were Mesopotamian performative scenario-texts providing shape and structure to the ritual. The existence of such texts in Greece and Rome can only be guessed at. On the basis of the available evidence, it has to be concluded that, certainly in Mesopotamia and specifically in the extispicy ritual, it was important to get the ritual right and pronounce the right words as an integral part of the ritual.

Third, questions and answers were sometimes written down, although this does not seem to have been done consistently in Greece. There is no evidence to suggest that records were systematically kept at Greek oracle sites. Either preservation was not thought to be necessary—or they have not survived. Why not? As we have seen, the most plausible answer is that the questions on the *lamellae* were written down for the benefit of the supernatural. Therefore, it was not necessary that they be recorded after the process: they had served their purpose. The most important contrast between the Mesopotamian and the Greek materials in the use of questions and answers is that the Mesopotamian questions were laid before the supernatural in written form, for both the supernatural and man to read. In Greece, if used, the written texts were, at least in theory, meant for the supernatural only.

The ideas explored above have consequences for the way the Greek text, the *homo divinans* and sign interacted. In Rome and especially in Mesopotamia, the interpretations were as clear and unambiguous as they were in Greece—but their mandate was reinforced by a smaller or greater amount of authoritative and standardized guidelines, leading to less discussion.[95] The dearth of written texts in Greece imbued the *homo divinans* with relatively greater importance but would also—in the Greek perception—have left more room for discussion about the meaning of particular signs: different interpretations would have competed with one another. Again, the Greek divinatory process appears to have allowed for a relatively large degree of flexibility and choice.

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[94] As has also been argued on pp. 83; 98.

[95] On divination as an unambiguous process see 20 n. 7 and Beerden & Naerebout, '"Gods cannot tell lies"', 121–147.

PART THREE

FUNCTION OF ANCIENT DIVINATION

CHAPTER SEVEN

TIME AND DIVINATION—DIVINATION AND TIME

A complicated interplay between divination and conceptions of time was present in each of the three cultural areas covered by this study. Divination was intertwined with, organized through and restricted by temporal frameworks. Divination can also tell us something about conceptions of time—laying the foundations for the study of uncertainty in the next chapter.

Ancient time is a problematic subject. Geoffrey Lloyd states: "quite apart from thinkers of whom we know nothing, there are many for whom the evidence is insufficient for us to speak confidently concerning their ideas on time."[1] The divinatory materials can inform about this problematic issue: what the ancient man-on-the-street would have deemed 'normal' ideas and conceptions about time. After all, divination is essentially based on the idea that there is a particular connection between the past, present and future.[2]

Although not discussed further in what follows, three underlying cultural factors should be taken into account: various cultures may have various time perspectives, for example to do with ideas about our position in relation to time: do we face the future or have our backs to it (which is why the future is unknown)?[3] Time attitudes are, among others, concerned with our ideas of how much time we have in life.[4] Time orientation relates to cultural emphasis on past, present or future. These factors

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[1] G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Views on time in Greek thought' in: L. Gardet et al. (eds), *Cultures and time* (Paris 1976) 117–148, at 117.

[2] Previous studies have explored time but not from the angle of divination, but see, e.g., on time and magic: A. Livingstone, 'The magic of time' in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn (eds), *Mesopotamian magic: textual, historical, and interpretative perspectives* (Leiden 1999) 131–137.

[3] A.G.E. Dunkel, 'Prossoo kai opissoo', *ZVS* 96 (1982–83) 66–87; M. Bettini, *Antropologia e cultura romana: parentela, tempo, immagini dell' anima* (Rome 1986) 133–143. Time perspectives in an anthropological study: N.M. Farriss, 'Remembering the future, anticipating the past: history, time, and cosmology among the Maya of Yucatan', *CSSH* 29 (1987) 566–593.

[4] People in modern Western societies expect that they will reach a certain, fairly advanced age and live in a certain prosperous state. In the ancient world this was not necessarily perceived in this way: life was subject to many threats.

construct, and perhaps even negotiate, general ideas about time in every society.[5]

This chapter commences with an exploration of certain chronological aspects of the process of divination itself. On which days was it possible to divine, and on which days was it better not to? Was there a particular time of the day which was most suitable? It has been noted in chapter 5 that time functioned as a context to the sign (pp. 135–136): this will be discussed here in more detail. In the second part of the investigation, conceptions of time which can be identified in the divinatory materials are discussed. The use of divination for finding 'the right moment' for an undertaking is analysed: if there was a right moment, time cannot have been considered as homogeneous. A further issue are the time limits to obtaining divinatory knowledge of past and future. Is the time horizon made explicit or left unspecified? Finally, the past can be used to think about the future. What does all of this mean for ideas about time as seen through the lens of divination?

Background to Time

Debates

Time is a major theme of discussion in many different subject areas—the literature on time, as time itself, "has no beginning or end".[6]

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[5] Terminology of these three factors: J.R. Nuttin, *Future time perspective and motivation: theory and research method* (Leuven 1984) 11; terminology on 'negotiating time': K. Clarke, *Making time for the past: local history and the polis* (Oxford 2008) vii.

[6] N.D. Munn, 'The cultural anthropology of time: a critical essay', *AnnRevAnth* 21 (1992) 93–123, at 93. Historians and ancient historians alike have worked on the topic 'time', which has become a major focus of study since the nineteenth century. For extensive bibliographical overviews see: G. Pronovost, 'Bibliography', *CS* 37.3 (1989) 99–124; P. Burke, 'Reflections on the cultural history of time', *Viator* 35 (2004) 617–626; and the special issue of the journal *Métis* 12–13 (1997–1998). For an overview of the main literature—from an anthropological perspective—dealing with time before 1992 see the bibliography in Munn, 'The cultural anthropology of time', 117–123. The *Altertumswissenschaft*, in the meanwhile, was also concerned with the subject. More recent studies are J.P. Vernant & P. Vidal-Naquet, *La Grèce ancienne: l'espace et le temps* (Paris 1992) and B. Stiegler, *La technique et le temps, 1: La faute d'Épiméthée* (Paris 1994); C. Darbo-Peschanski (ed.), *Constructions du temps dans le monde grec ancien* (Paris 2000); B. André Salvini, 'La conscience du temps in Mésopotamie' in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet & H. Lozachmeur (eds), *Proche-Orient ancien, temps vécu, temps pensé: actes de la table-ronde du 15 Novembre 1997* (Paris 1998) 29–37; E. Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions and quantifications of time in Assyria and Babylonia, c. 750–250 BCE' in: R.M. Rosen (ed.), *Time and temporality in the ancient world* (Philadelphia 2004) 45–90.

Despite (or because of) the fact that time is discussed so intensively, there is still no consensus on its nature. Some say time is a dimension, closely linked to space, but it has also been argued that it does not exist in its own right but is a human creation.[7] It is this human experience of time which is important for the purposes of this discussion. Time is used in order to structure and measure human experience. Human experiences of time are astronomical and biological, societal and individual-psychological—categories which, in practice, cannot always be separated from each other.

The first two varieties are usually the same for every human being (although their measurement is not because this is culturally defined). Societal time is important to the study of divination because both are cultural constructs which affect one another. Societal time is the way in which time is kept track of, described and measured—and whatever interpretation is put upon it. There have been many attempts to capture recurring patterns in something like a calendar, endeavours which have led to *Verzeitlichung*,[8] but keeping track of time and time measurement was a relatively primitive affair in the ancient world.[9] One of the main debates with respect to societal time in the ancient world is whether time was experienced in a cyclical or linear fashion or both simultaneously. Some have claimed that Greeks saw time as cyclical. This is one of the great contrasts which could—supposedly—be drawn between polytheistic cultures and their Judeo-Christian counterparts. However, over forty years ago the work of Arnoldo Momigliano made it clear that a completely cyclical conception of Greek time is an untenable proposition: truly cyclical views were entertained by some philosophers, but in practice were a

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[7] See V. Evans, *The structure of time: language, meaning and temporal cognition* (Amsterdam 2003) for an overview of the phenomenology of time, debate on its existence and problems related to experience of time.

[8] W. Katzinger (ed.), *Zeitbegriff: Zeitmessung und Zeitverständnis im städtischen Kontext* (Linz/Donau 2002). On *Verzeitlichung*: D.S. Landes, *Revolution in time: clocks and the making of the modern world* (Cambridge, MA 1983).

[9] There were sundials and water clocks, and there were calendars as well as very advanced equipment to assist in keeping calendrical time, like the famous Antikythera Mechanism. A bibliography on the mechanism on the website of the Antikythera Mechanism Research Project: http://www.antikythera-mechanism.gr/bibliography. Visited 23-01-2010. The studies on chronology and calendrical time are many—these can be seen as a sub-genre within ancient studies of time—and I shall mention only a few recent important publications: D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's calendar: ancient time and the beginnings of history* (Berkeley 2007); R. Hannah, *Greek and Roman calendars: constructions of time in the classical world* (London 2005); D. Lehoux, *Astronomy, weather, and calendars in the ancient world: parapegmata and related texts in Classical and Near Eastern societies* (Cambridge 2007).

rare phenomenon.[10] If events are really seen to recur in cycles (everything which happens now has happened before and will happen again), these cycles follow one another in a linear progression.[11]

The individual-psychological experience of time going by is also important to the study of divination and time. This includes some of the biorhythms mentioned above, but also a person's lifetime and life span (the two are connected in, for instance, the perceived speeding up of time as a person grows older). Duration of time and the speed of time are the sphere of numerous illusions which are part of the individual-psychological experience of time.[12]

When time and our—societal or biographical—experiences of it are analysed in greater detail, new distinctions can be made. People living in the same society at the same time but are of a different age, gender, or belonging to a different social group, might not experience or understand the same thing: their concepts might differ or they might have different concerns and ways of expressing these.[13] When it comes to experiencing and interpreting time, it is fairly obvious that the individuals from the three cultural areas discussed here—not even taking the factors

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[10] A.D. Momigliano, '1. Time in ancient historiography' in: A.D. Momigliano et al. (eds), *History and the concept of time* (Middletown, CONN 1966) 1–23. As Astrid Möller and Nino Luraghi have written: "We cannot label one culture cyclical, another linear, because most people perceive time in different ways according to their context or situation, with the result that any one culture is characterised by a range of different perceptions of time." A. Möller & N. Luraghi, 'Time in the writing of history: perceptions and structures', *Storia della Storiografia* 28 (1995) 3–15, *apud* Feeney, *Caesar's calendar*, 3. In the same vein, Denis Feeney observes that "in any society individuals are liable to inhabit different frames of time, often simultaneously—cyclical or recurrent, linear, seasonal, social, historical" (Feeney, *Caesar's calendar*, 3).

[11] See M.H. Hansen, *The triumph of time* (Copenhagen 2002) 47–59 on various ways of conceptualizing time. Differences in perceptions of time (in this case between human and supernatural) see P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Temps des dieux et temps des hommes: essai sur quelques aspects de l'expérience temporelle chez les Grecs', *RHR* 157 (1960) 55–80.

[12] D. Draaisma, 'Waarom het leven sneller gaat als je ouder wordt' in: idem, *Waarom het leven sneller gaat als je ouder wordt* (Groningen 2001) 205–229; M.G. Flaherty, *The textures of time: agency and temporal experience* (Philadephia 2011); M.G. Flaherty, *A watched pot: how we experience time* (New York 1999).

[13] As discussed by P. Burke, who uses the term 'occasionalism' to express this: 'Reflections', 626. However, generalization is necessary because the ancient sources do not always allow otherwise. The most common classification of different experiences of time are: social and cultural time—as discussed above—but also political time, ritual time, spatial and bodily time or gendered time. See E.K. Silverman, 'Time, anthropology of' in: N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* vol. 23 (Amsterdam 2001) 15683–15686. For some examples of studies of groups and their perspectives on time: G. Pronovost, 'Time and social class', *CS* 37.3 (1989) 63–74; Greek time and social differences: Darbo-Peschanski, *Constructions du temps, passim*.

of gender, social group and age into account, simply because the source materials to do this are not available—might have had viewpoints rather different from ours and from one another. Still, in what follows I suggest that general relationships between ancient divination and perceptions of time can be deduced.

Time Influences Divination

Good Timing

Practices of divination could be restricted and influenced by existing social conceptions of time. Specific times of day might have been thought to facilitate the perceived contact with the supernatural. Anthropological evidence shows that some cultures only divine during the heat of the day, never at night, or only in the early morning.[14] The Greek Magical Papyri—which lie outside the chronological boundaries of my enquiries—contain information about the existence of days and hours suitable for divination: on the first of the month divination should take place at dawn, on the second at noon and so forth.[15] Why exactly these times were considered to be good to divine is shrouded in mystery.

The Roman and Greek materials with which I am concerned do not reveal extensive evidence of a preference for divining at a particular time of day. There are examples of oracular sessions being extended over two consecutive days, incorporating a night into the process—receiving questions on the one day and answering them the next. Examples of this practice can be found at such Greek oracles-sites such as Korope and Lucian's account of practices at Abonuteichos (a late example which can still indicate possible practices).[16] Considering Korope, it could (emically) be argued that the inclusion of a night gave the supernatural the opportunity to 'read' the question and answer the next day.[17] Alexandros of Abonuteichos is depicted as claiming that he obtained answers overnight. There were also practical reasons why a particular time of day might be thought suitable to perform divination. Daylight was essential to some divinatory

[14] P. Peek, 'African divination systems: non-normal modes of cognition' in: idem, *Ways of knowing: African divination systems* (Bloomington 1991) 191–212, at 197.

[15] *PGM* VII 155–167.

[16] On questions of historicity of Lucian's *Alexandros* cf. p. 165 n. 68.

[17] See for a discussion on the probability of the following practice at Korope, where the questions were kept in a jar overnight: Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 25–26 (with many references).

procedures,[18] while some examinations of the skies or evoked oneiromancy probably took place at night. The dreamer needed to be asleep to receive a sign and some phenomena in the skies could only be seen during the night.

More extensive evidence of the necessity of proper timing can be found in Mesopotamia. The practical considerations of course apply equally to Mesopotamia, but in addition there is a very specific Mesopotamian divinatory method for which the time of day at which the procedure took place mattered more for theological reasons: extispicy. This ritual took place during the night and culminated in the perceived production of a sign when the day started again: the *ikribu* prayers show that there were suitable times during the night for specific ritual actions in the performance of extispicy. In the early hours of the morning, a sheep had to be sacrificed; a smoke offering to Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, and so on, had to be made.[19] Some argue that the whole process was based on the idea that the future was determined when the sun appeared, after the supernatural had met during the night. The council of the gods would decide each case, with Šamaš presiding over the ruling (which might later be 'appealed' against by means of other rituals). This ruling was provided in the shape of a sign at the daily rising of Šamaš.[20] Hence, the ritual was conducted on a diurnal basis (although there were also monthly and yearly cycles).[21] The timing of the ritual can be assumed to have been a theological necessity.

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[18] Found in *PGM* VII 250–244 and 255–259, among others. No explicit examples of this use of light are available from the three cultural areas discussed here, but it is common sense that some procedures would have required clear visibility.

[19] See the (outdated) edition by Zimmern, *Beiträge*, numbers 1–20 100–101; line 69–75; 104–105, line 127. But also see other times and actions in, e.g., lines 31 (being cleansed before the sun went down), 41 (feed the gods when the stars appear), 55 (start smoke offerings at an unclear time); 101 (offer to the gods when the darkness became lighter(?)), 127 (smoke offerings to gods before sunrise).

[20] Cf. pp. 209–210. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* on how to avoid such a ruling by means of apotropaic ritual.

[21] Sources for yearly cycles: Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Graec.* 292ef in which he explains that, in the past, the one day on which the Delphic oracle was open in spring was the birthday of Apollo. There are ideas in all three cultural areas about why one particular day would be chosen. For a summary of this argument on Mesopotamia by J. Polonsky see *The rise of the sun god and the determination of destiny in ancient Mesopotamia* (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania 2002) 971–980. See for an argument why in the yearly cycle the New Year and spring were important to Roman oracular practice J. Champeaux, *Fortuna: recherches sur le culte de la Fortune à Rome et dans le monde romain des origines à la mort de César* vol. 1 (Rome 1982) 58–61.

Reasons of a theological nature are less visible in Greece and Rome than in Mesopotamia. Still, in all three cultural areas timing was necessary to facilitate the transmission of the divine sign—which needed to tie in with the timetable of the supernatural or for more practical purposes.[22] In both cases, sign and interpretation needed to be organized into a time frame, which restricted and arranged divination.

On Which Days to Divine

The suitability of particular days for divinatory activity can be considered. In Greece, the evidence is, again, scarce:[23] at Didyma there appear to have been particular days on which the oracle was open;[24] with regard to Korope, too, much is uncertain but it is clear that the oracle was available on ὅταν συντελῆται τὸ μαντεῖον ('On the oracular days')—whichever these might have been and with whatever frequency they occurred.[25] Only in the case of Delphi do we happen to have more detailed information about suitable and unsuitable days for divination. Plutarch says that in the Archaic age this oracle site was 'open' only one day a year, but that at a later date it was used for nine to twelve days every year (the oracle in which a white or black bean was picked probably operated more often, perhaps even continuously).[26] These days were spread out more or less evenly throughout the year, corresponding to the Delphic religious calendar designating certain dates as the days of Apollo (in the Athenian

[22] As mentioned in n. 11 of this chapter, the seminal work on 'the timetable of the supernatural' is: Vidal-Naquet, 'Temps des dieux et temps des hommes'.

[23] For two Mycenaean examples, however, see M. Ventris & J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge 1973[2]) 6.311, number 207. We do know that some days were considered 'good' or 'lucky' but the evidence does not indicate consequences for divinatory practice. For example, in Greece, the sixth of Thargelion was a good day (Ael. *VH* 2.25) (although there do not seem to be consequences for divinatory practices).

[24] It is uncertain how many times this oracle was open each year—Fontenrose puts the maximum number at 52, arguing that the mouthpiece of the god needed to fast for 3 days before pronouncing, the fourth day would be the oracular day, and he seems to assume that normal food would be required for another three days before recommencing the fast (Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 85). However, this is all very speculative.

[25] Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 17; 21.

[26] Cf. Amandry, *La mantique apollinienne*, 25–40; 57–65. Other divinatory methods, apart from the oracular pronouncements by the Pythia, seem to have been used at Delphi and we are not aware of any time restrictions related to them: cleromancy using white and dark beans is most famous, but some say ornithomancy, extispcicy, empiromancy, aleuromancy and dendromancy also took place at Delphi.

calendar this was the seventh of each month).[27] It has been stated many times that the number of days the oracle was in business each year could, nevertheless, have only been nine, because the oracle was supposedly closed for three months because Apollo was believed to be in the habit of quitting Delphi during the winter months, temporarily ceding his place to Dionysus.[28] Whether there were nine or twelve days of oracular activity each year in any case still leaves a very limited number of days suitable for oracular consultation of the Pythia. The following example, which has sometimes been used to illustrate leeway was possible, is very exceptional (and no real oracle is provided!):

> And now, wishing to consult the god concerning the expedition against Asia, he [Alexander] went to Delphi; and since he chanced to come on one of the inauspicious days, when it is not lawful to deliver oracles, in the first place he sent a summons to the prophetess. And when she refused to perform her office and cited the law in her excuse, he went up himself and tried to drag her to the temple, whereupon, as if overcome by his ardour, she said: "Thou art invincible, my son!" On hearing this, Alexander said he desired no further prophecy, but had from her the oracle which he wanted.[29]

In Mesopotamia there were other arrangements in place: divination functioned in a system of 'auspicious days' (*uttuku*) which were formalized

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[27] Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Graec.* 292ef. For an evaluation of Plutarch's ideas about the Delphic oracle see Parke, *Greek oracles*, 80–81. On the days dedicated to Apollo see J.D. Mikalson, *The sacred and civil calendar of the Athenian year* (Princeton 1975) 19, and the seventh of each month on Mikalson's calendar. Although an *argumentum ex silentio* is naturally not a solid one, it can here be said that the Athenian sacred calendar does not explicitly state that some days would have been more auspicious or positive for divinatory activities. See the absence of divination and oracles in the discussions by L.A. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) *passim*.

[28] J.E. Fontenrose, basing himself on Plutarch's text which says that the singing of the *paian* to Apollo stopped for three months—instead dithyrambs in honour of Dionysos were sung—argues that this does not necessarily mean the oracular consultations stopped. See Plut. *Mor. De E apud Delphos* 389c and J.E. Fontenrose, *Python: a study of Delphic myth and its origins* (Berkeley 1959) 379. W. Halliday supports this idea in *The Greek questions of Plutarch* (Oxford 1928); The evidence is discussed in Amandry, *La mantique apollinienne*, 81–83; cf. Parke, *Greek oracles*, 105. In A. Salt & E. Boutsikas, 'Knowing when to consult the oracle at Delphi', *Ant* 79 (2005) 564–572 astronomical calculations show when Apollo was supposed to return to Delphi each year.

[29] Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14.6–7. Translation: B. Perrin. Edition: Teubner. βουλόμενος δὲ τῷ θεῷ χρήσασθαι περὶ τῆς στρατείας, ἦλθεν εἰς Δελφούς, καὶ κατὰ τύχην ἡμερῶν ἀποφράδων οὐσῶν, ἐν αἷς οὐ νενόμισται θεμιστεύειν, πρῶτον μὲν ἔπεμπε παρακαλῶν τὴν πρόμαντιν. ὡς δ' ἀρνουμένης καὶ προϊσχομένης τὸν νόμον αὐτὸς ἀναβὰς βίᾳ πρὸς τὸν ναὸν εἵλκεν αὐτήν, ἡ δ' ὥσπερ ἐξηττημένη τῆς σπουδῆς εἶπεν· "ἀνίκητος εἶ ὦ παῖ," τοῦτ' ἀκούσας ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος οὐκέτ' ἔφη χρήζειν ἑτέρου μαντεύματος, ἀλλ' ἔχειν ὃν ἐβούλετο παρ' αὐτῆς χρησμόν.

into hemerologies, and menologies for 'auspicious months'.[30] Almost every month contained five intrinsically bad days—the reason particular days were perceived to be intrinsically bad was probably related to the moon and its phases.[31] One Neo-Assyrian source shows that fifteen days in one particular month were suitable for divination.[32] The rules set by the hemerologies and menologies mattered: they were adhered to—including those regarding divination—and only very few exceptions are known.[33]

In Roman Italy, it appears that the oracle at Praeneste, as well as other oracles, was open only on a limited number of days every year (including on the first day of the New Year). Why the oracles were open on those particular days is still unknown, but for New Year's day explanations have been sought in the symbolism of commencing the year.[34] Moreover, there was a system of favourable and unfavourable days for particular actions—which affected when divination did and did not take place. The beginning of new undertakings was regulated by a complicated system of favourable and unfavourable days.[35] Divination is not explicitly singled out as permitted or forbidden during any of these days, but is unlikely to have taken place since both public and private religious activities were avoided on *dies atri*.[36]

There were suitable and unsuitable days for divination in each cultural area, although the means with which these days were regulated could differ. Time served as one of the organizing factors for divinatory practice.

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[30] Hemerology is a term which is much broader than this and can be used by ancient authors to refer to texts ranging from a calendar to a diary. It is essentially 'a text arranged according to the days of the year': J. Rüpke, 'Hemerologion' in: *NewP*. Visited 04-02-2010.

[31] And it should be noted that, just to complicate matters, bad days could also be favourable: Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions', 66.

[32] SAA 8 235 12. Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 612.

[33] A. Livingstone, 'The case of hemerologies: official cult, learned formulation and popular practice' in: E. Matsushima (ed.), *Official cult and popular religion in the ancient Near East: papers of the first colloquium on the ancient Near East—the city and its life, held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20–22, 1992* (Heidelberg 1993) 97–113, at 109. See for a recent introduction to Neo-Assyrian hemerologies: L. Marti, 'Les hémérologies Néo-Assyriennes' in: J.M. Durand & A. Jacquet (eds), *Magie et divination dans les cultures de l'orient: actes du colloque organisé par l'Institut du Proche-Orient ancien du Collège de France, la Société Asiatique et le CNRS (UMR 7192) les 19 mai et 20 juin 2008, Paris* (Paris 2010) 41–60. When more texts are published, they will add to our knowledge of Mesopotamian hemerologies: an edition is currently in preparation by A. Livingstone.

[34] This is evidence from the Empire—J. Champeaux takes it as an indication of what might have happened in the Republic. See Champeaux, *Fortuna*, vol. 1, 58–59. Cf. this chapter n. 21.

[35] Cf. J. Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit: die Geschichte der Repräsentation und religiösen Qualifikation von Zeit in Rom* (Berlin 1995) 563–575; 580.

[36] A.K. Michels, *The calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton, NJ 1962) 65–66.

Time as Context

Time could also function as a context for the sign, influencing its meaning. Mesopotamian menologies, hemerologies and the Roman brontoscopic calendar are evidence that this occurred in two of the three cultural areas. These texts provided a context of time to the divinatory sign.

In Rome, the character of the day on which a particular sign was observed could affect its meaning.[37] This is confirmed by the brontoscopic calendar which shows that the meaning of a sign could vary according to the date on which it occurred. In the following fragment from the brontoscopic calendar, in all cases the sign is thunder (perhaps longer or shorter rumbles), phrased in the protasis as follows: 'ἐὰν βροντήσῃ' ('if in any way it should thunder') and in the calendar also 'εἰ βροντήσῃ' ('if it thunders'). The apodosis is different for every day of every month. The date on which the sign occurred determined its meaning:

> [day] 1. If in any way it should thunder, it signifies both a good harvest and good cheer.
> [day] 2. If in any way it should thunder, there will be discord among the common people.
> [day] 3. If in any way it should thunder, it signifies heavy rains and war.
> [etc.][38]

Although we do not have such unequivocal examples from other divinatory methods, this text indicates that time could be taken into account as a contextual factor in Rome.

The Mesopotamian series *Iqqur ippuš* shows that the meaning of a particular action depended on the month in which the action took place. Here, too, time provides a context for the sign:

> If in Nisannu (Month 1) he builds a temple: its foundations will not be stable
> If in Ayyaru (Month 2), ditto: he will see evil
> If in Simanu (Month 3), ditto: joy
> If in Du'uzu (Month 4), ditto: his temple will last
> If in Abu (Month 5), ditto: his heart will be content[39]

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[37] Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit*, 576–582.

[38] Nigid. September (30) 1–3. Edition and translation: MacIntosh Turfa, *Divining the Etruscan world*, 76; 91. α. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, εὐετηρίαν ἅμα καὶ εὐφροσύνην δηλοῖ. | β. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, διχόνοια τῷ δήμῳ ἔσται.| γ. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, κατομβρίαν καὶ πόλεμον δηλοῖ.

[39] *Iqqur ippuš*, paragraph 5, 1–5. Edition: R. Labat, *Un calendrier Babylonien des travaux, des signes et des mois* (*séries Iqqur Îpuš*) (Paris 1965) 62–63. Translation: Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions', 67. DIŠ *ina Nisanni* É DÙ-*uš* SUḪUŠ.BI NU GI.NA | DIŠ *ina Aiari* MIN ŠÀ.

In Greece, the evidence does not indicate extensive use of time as a contextual factor: this was certainly not written down or systematized as it was in Mesopotamia or Rome. The meaning of the sign was, apparently, formally not changed by the time on which it occurred. Of course, the *homo divinans* might have taken time into account informally, together with other possible contextual factors.

Divination Reveals Conceptions of Time

Divination in order to Discover the Right Time

One of the functions of divination could be to determine the 'right time' to commence an undertaking or perform an action. When the Roman auspices were taken, the supernatural answered the question: should this action be performed and should it be performed now? If the answer was negative, the same question could be asked again at a later date in order to see if the supernatural would think it right at that time. Taking the auspices in Rome both served to legitimate an undertaking and to discover the most favourable moment for it. Also, the Roman calendar was dynamic: a day could even *become* negative if a particularly bad event or sign from the supernatural (or both) happened to occur.[40] In this way, the appearance of signs affected the Roman calendar: divination could also influence the flow of time.

The standard Greek term for 'the right time' was *kairos* (in Latin: *occasio*).[41] The concept of *kairos* was already familiar in Greece in the Archaic period, for example implicitly in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.[42] Finding the right time was a central concern in the Greek divinatory processes performed before military actions. If the signs proved unfavourable, the army had to stay put, even if this was highly inconvenient. Xenophon's

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ḪUL IGI-*mar* | DIŠ *ina Simâni* (MIN) ŠÀ. ḪÚL.LA (GAR-*šu*) | DIŠ *ina Du'uzi* (MIN) É.BI SUMUN-*bar* | DIŠ *ina Abi* ŠÀ.BI DÙG.GA.

[40] Michels, *The calendar of the Roman Republic*, 63–64. See for an example Liv. 6.1.11–12.

[41] Cf. B. Schaffner, 'Kairos', *NewP.* Visited 18-08-2011.

[42] E.g. Hes. *Op.* 694–698. Apart from the meaning 'the right time', *kairos* could also mean: the right season, the right place, due measure, advantage/profit. See for a detailed study of the concept and its uses in the archaic world, medicine, oratory, and politics: M. Trédé, *Kairos: L'à-propos et l'occasion* (*Le mot et la notion, d'Homère à la fin du IV^e siècle avant J.-C.*) (Paris 1992); but also M. Kerkhoff, 'Zum antiken Begriff des Kairos', *ZPhF* 27 (1973) 256–274.

army wanted to move, but the signs did not allow it—he would have to keep trying until they did:

> When they sacrificed, however, with a view to their departure, the victims would not prove favourable, and they accordingly ceased their offerings for that day.[43]

In Mesopotamia, the queries contained explicit temporal restrictions: if the outcome of a divinatory session was negative, this would continue to be valid for, for example, thirty days.[44] In addition, there could clearly be a 'right time' in the future:

> To the king, my lord: your servant Issar-šumu-ereš. Good health to the king, my lord! May Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord! The 20th, the 22nd and the 25th are good days for concluding the treaty. We shall undertake (that) they may conclude it whenever the king, my lord, says.[45]

In all three cultural areas, there was such a thing as a 'right time' for an action which could be confirmed (or even discovered in advance in some situations) by means of divination. Time is perceived as non-homogeneous—it is not a free-flowing, undifferentiated mass but marked by distinct phases.

Scope in Time

The duration of time ('time horizons') which can be explored by means of divination differed in the three cultural areas.[46] In the Greek materials time (and its horizons) are for the most part left implicit. Oracular questions obviously have a sense of time ingrained in them because they normally led to future action, but this is mostly not mentioned in the sources.[47]

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[43] Xen. *An.* 6.4.13.4–6.4.14.1. Θυομένοις δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀφόδῳ οὐκ ἐγίγνετο τὰ ἱερά. ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν ἡμέραν ἐπαύσαντο.

[44] Cf. this chapter, n. 64.

[45] Other examples are SAA 10 14 rev. 1–10; SAA 10 70. The text above is SAA 10 5 1–rev. 6. Translation: S. Parpola. *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* | ARAD-*ka* ^{m}15—MU—KAM-*eš* | *lu šul-mu* | *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* | ^{d}AG *u* ^{d}AMAR.UTU | *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* | *lik-ru-bu* | UD-20-KÁM | UD-22-KÁM | UD-25-KÁM | *a-na šá-ka-ni* | *ša a-de-e* | *ṭa-a-ba* | *im-ma-at* LUGAL *be-li* | *i-qab-bu-u-ni* | *nu-šá-aṣ-bi-it* | *liš-ku-nu.*

[46] See for 'time horizons': S.A. van 't Klooster, *Toekomstverkenning: ambities en de praktijk: een etnografische studie naar de productie van toekomstkennis bij het Ruimtelijk Planbureau* (Delft 2007) 125–127.

[47] Note that there is one *lamella* of a person without citizenship who asks the oracle if he should request this citizenship now or in the future, which might be translated more explicitly as E. Eidinow does: "shall I request citizenship this year or the next?" Yet, perhaps a more neutral translation is better: "shall I request citizenship now at this time or in

There are only a few scattered examples in the literary and epigraphical sources in which a moment in time is specified. In these more exeptional cases when time is mentioned at all, questions and answers referred to 'somewhere in the near past and future' or 'later' such as this example from Dodona:

> [...] if I will be able to sail to Syrakuse, to the colony, later.[48]

Or by more explicitly mentioning 'future time' or 'that which is to be':

> [...] and security of things and enjoyment from things to come.[49]
>
> Gods. Good luck. Eu[b?]andros and his wife ask Zeus Naios and Dione by praying to which of the gods or heroes or daimons and sacrificing will they and their household do better both now and for all time.[50]

At Didyma there were three questions asked of the oracle—all by the Milesians between 228–225 BC—which state explicitly: καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον.[51] It is very rare that questions did become more explicit, such as this one:

> Shall I request citizenship this year or next?[52]

Furthermore, there is an oracle from Delphi stating that the enquirers should finish the work on the temple quickly so that the suppliants can be received in the right month;[53] and a reply stating that every eight years the Athenians should look towards Harma and that they will see a sign of lightning. When this happens a procession will have to be sent to Delphi and a sacrifice will have to be made.[54] Despite—among others—these

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the coming time?" The *lamella* in question is Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, number 61B, cf. n. 52 below.

[48] Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 79 (number 17). Translation: E. Eidinow. [...] καὶ δυνήομαι | πλὲν εἰς Συρακόσας | πρὸς τὴν ἀποικίαν ὕστερο- | ν.

[49] Eadem, 92 (number 13). Translation: E. Eidinow. [...] κὴ χρεμάτων | ἐπιγγ[ύ]ασις κὴ τῶν ἰόντων ὄνασις.

[50] Eadem, 111 (number 6). Translation: E. Eidinow. Θε(ο)ί. Τύχαν ἀγαθάν. 'Επικοινῆται Εὔβαν- | δρος καὶ ἀ γυνὰ τῶι Διεὶ τῶι Νάωι καὶ τᾶι Δι- | ώναι, τίνι κα θεῶν ἢ ἡρώων ἢ δαιμόνων | εὐχόμενοι καὶ φύοντες λώϊον καὶ ἄμεινο- | ν πράσσοιεν καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀ οἰκησις καὶ νῦν | καὶ ἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.

[51] And variations on this theme. Fontenrose, *Didyma*, H5 (228/7BC); H6(?) (228/7BC); H8 (225 BC).

[52] Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 115 (number 1). Translation: E. Eidinow. 'Η αἰτέωμαι T A N I | πολιτείαν ἐπὶ ταύτὶ | ἢ τοῦ εἰσιόντος.

[53] Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, H 31.

[54] Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, H 57.

sources, in the Greek epigraphical materials explicit references to past, present and future are limited.

However, it might still be possible to ask whether there were limits to a predictable future and explainable past—and if so, what? Greek divination certainly tended to be concerned with a limited timeframe. In the Dodonaic materials, a suppliant could ask—and receive an answer to—questions about the near past and future. Clients asked about their children and there is one example in which a father enquires about his son's disease: whether or not he will get better. While this might theoretically refer to a longer period of time, the father was more probably concerned with a rapid cure.[55] Where time is made explicit, there are no questions or answers referring to a distant future or a distant past: there normally appears to be an implicit or explicit limit of time horizons of around one year in the epigraphical sources.

Many of the literary sources mirror this image of short-term concerns: even when Alexander the Great's seer Aristander predicted that Alexander would take the city of Tyre that same month, this prediction was made on the last day of the month—and Alexander duly took the city on that same day.[56] Propitiousness pronounced during extispicy usually had to do with an action or event which would take place in the very near future. This observation also applies to indications of negative events, such as impending death.[57] Other literary sources reveal wider time horizons. For example, the Pythia at Delphi tells Croesus two things after his defeat. The first is that Apollo desired the downfall of Croesus' family—the consequence of a crime committed five generations ago—to occur one generation later, but this turned out to be impossible. The second is that Apollo had managed to postpone the downfall for three years.[58] Note that this is a retrospective use of divination, explaining the current situation by reference to the past. However, ancient authors might have been tempted to employ the aspect of wide time horizons as a literary or rhetorical device, so caution should be taken with these literary materials—especially since epigraphical materials and some of the literary sources show such limited evidence of wider time horizons.

All in all, time is elusive in the divinatory materials. Even when exceptions are taken into account, Greek divination tends to have a sense of

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55 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 105 (number 3).
56 Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 25.1–2.
57 See, e.g., also sources such as Arr. *Anab.* 7.18; Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 73.2; Plut. *Vit. Pyr.* 30.3.
58 Hdt. 1.91.1–3.

urgency about it. Divination was about a time which appears not to have been far away and this most often did not even need to be specified. If we say the Greeks knew past, present and future through divination, we must in practice be referring to the recent past and near future.

The Roman materials are even more preoccupied with the very near future or the recent past. The *prodigia* required semi-immediate action to make up for a disturbance in the recent past. After having acknowledged a *prodigium* as such, a course of action would need to be set out and this was normally executed within a small space of time:

> The sky seemed to be all on fire, and other portents were either actually seen, or people in their fright imagined that they saw them. To avert these alarming omens, public intercessions were ordered for three days, during which all the temples were filled with crowds of men and women imploring the protection of the gods.[59]

Two other principal methods of divination in Rome, the *auspicia* and reading the *exta*, revealed the approval or disapproval of the supernatural of present matters (reflecting the idea that it was important to 'find the right moment') or those in the near future.[60] The auspicia were valid for one day only. The *omina* were also about occurrences in the very near future. In Rome, the most important methods of divination were concerned with the present and its immediate surroundings.

The Mesopotamian compendia are composed in a systematic and almost timeless fashion. In striking contrast to this, many of the queries for extispicy mention very *specific* timeframes. Experts asked the supernatural a question such as:

> [I ask you, Šamaš], great lord, whether fr[om this day, the 28th day of this month, the month . . . of t]his [year], to the 27th day of [this month, . . . of this year, for 30 days] and nights, the [term] stipulated [for the performance of (this) extispicy]—[(whether) within this stipulated term M]ugallu the Melide[an with his troops will . . . . .] [. . .].[61]

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[59] Liv. 3.5.14. Translation: Rev. Canon Roberts. Edition: Teubner. caelum visum est ardere plurimo igni, portentaque alia aut obversata oculis aut vanas exterritis ostentavere species. his avertendis terroribus in triduum feriae indictae, per quas omnia delubra pacem deum exposcentium virorum mulierumque turba inplebantur.

[60] See also Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 43 where the time limit is three days and Plut. *Vit. Sull.* 17 where the limit is within a few days. It must be added that we do see some explicit time-limits here. Still, it must be noted that these are late and literary sources.

[61] SAA 4 6 1–4. Edition and translation: I. Starr. [*a-šal-ka* ^{d}UTU] EN GAL-*ú* GIM ⌜TA⌝ [UD-*mu* NE-*i* UD-28-KÁM *šá* ITI NE-*i* ITI.x] | [*šá* MU.AN.NA *an*]-*ni-ti* EN UD-27-KÁM *šá* [ITI NE-i ITI.x *šá* MU.AN.NA *an-ni-ti*] | [*a-na* 30 UD.MEŠ] ⌜30⌝ MI.MEŠ *ši-kin* [*a-dan-ni-ia*

The question was framed by time: it was very specifically aimed at what the enemy would do during the next thirty days. A standard sentence describes the time period for which the divination would be valid, proposed to the supernatural by the expert: "from this day, the . . . th day of this month MN, until the . . . day of the month MN of this year, for a period of X days and X nights, the term stipulated for the performance of extispicy—within this stipulated term."[62] There are also tablets on which the timeframe is one hundred days, ninety days, fifty days, forty days, twenty days and seven days.[63] It is uncertain on what basis the experts asked the supernatural for a particular timeframe but unquestionably the supernatural was thought to set the definitive timeframe in its reply. This frame could then be discovered by calculations on the basis of findings in the liver.[64]

Mesopotamian extispicy was obviously directed towards defining the period for which the prediction was valid. The timeframe cannot be argued to have been much wider than the Greek one (although it was most probably more extensive than the Roman one). Nevertheless, it was very specific and precise: as a result of this specificity, the future with which Mesopotamian divination is concerned comes into much sharper focus than the Greek timeframe in which 'now' and 'later' were relatively fluid concepts for something happening either in the present or near future.[65]

There is also a striking difference in social scope and space of divination, mirroring the findings on time. There was a Mesopotamian tendency

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DÙ-*eš-ti ba-ru-ti i-na ši-kin*] | [*a-dan-ni šu-a-tú* ^{m}] ⌜*mu*⌝-*gal-lu* ^{KUR}*mi-*⌜*li*⌝-[*da-a-a* x x x x x x x x x x x x x] [. . .].

[62] Starr, *Queries*, xvi–xvii. Other examples are SAA 4 4 2–3; 4 5 2–3; 4 23 2–4; 4 35 2–3; 4 45 rev. 1–3; 4 46 rev. 1–3; 4 47 2–5; 4 51 2–3.

[63] 100 days: SAA 4 43 2–3; 90 days: SAA 4 139 2–3; 50 days: SAA 4 124 2–3; 40 days: SAA 4 44 4–5. Another example is SAA 4 125; 20 days: SAA 4 203 2–3. Other examples are SAA 4 28 2–3; 4 60 2–3; 7 days: SAA 4 49 2–3. See also Starr, *Queries*, xvi. The same can be seen in the *tamītu* texts: see for a period of 100 days Lambert, *Oracle questions*, no. 15; and '[up to the second day of] Nisan of the following next year' see no. 21.

[64] Ulla Jeyes suggests that the *adannu* (timeframe as stipulated by the gods) was dependent on particular features of the liver: U. Jeyes, 'Divination as a science in ancient Mesopotamia', *JEOL* 32 (1991–1992) 23–41, at 32. For a more detailed study see N.P. Heeßel, 'The calculation of the stipulated term in extispicy' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 163–175, at 165–168. He also refers to the fact that the timeframe is calculated differently from the way it was done for extispicy for the interpretation of celestial signs, as shown by Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens*, 64.

[65] This is confirmed by a source such as Xen. *An*. 1.7.18: it tells about Cyrus who receives a prediction (from a Greek expert, but he would cater to the needs of his client) that his opponent will not attack within the next ten days.

to focus on the actions of the other as well as on one's own deeds. In Mesopotamia a client could have the expert ask about what *others* (for example, the enemy) would do or achieve. Only a couple of such questions are known from Greece: there, normally, either questions concerning the client himself or more general questions concerned with truth ('who/what caused X') were posed.[66] A certain focus on the individual in the Greek material is to be expected because of the private nature of many oracle questions. However, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the same pattern reoccurs in questions asked by Greek communities.[67] In Greece—and also in Rome—questions were almost without exception about the persons or collectives asking them. In Mesopotamian divination, questions such as the following could be asked: will person X do Y within a specified period of time? The evidence of social scope concurs with the evidence of time scope: an answer to a divinatory question could bridge a gap in social dimensions as well as in time. The Mesopotamian supernatural appeared to know through time and space.

Past and Future

Past interpretations of signs were important when these same signs had to be interpreted again. Memories and experience of the past could be an aid when shaping ideas about the future by means of divination. Use of precedent is an even more explicit way of using the past to consider the future. A precedent is a past event, or previously 'proven' relationship between events, which serves as a guide for present decision making. Present circumstances are considered the same as those in the past: an analogy between past and present can be drawn. It should be noted that the use of a precedent is not necessarily binding; that a precedent is based

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[66] Exceptions are (according to Lhôte's edition): 10b asking whether another person will succeed; 73 about whether or not somebody will be cured. It could be argued for the last question that the individual, who was ill, was not able to come himself and therefore someone else would have to ask the question.

[67] Some exceptions: see the catalogue of historical questions by Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 244–267. Note that some of the questions included in the catalogue are late. Possible exceptions to the rule of asking about the self only are H3 (individual question, spurious according to Fontenrose); H17 (question about how to deal with a threatening individual); H37 (question appears to be about the status of another individual—unless the one asking the question is also the one the answer is about); H65 (question wanting to know Homer's birthplace and parents); H69 (question about wanting to know where the soul of Plotinus has gone). I have not dealt with the questions Fontenrose does not think are historical here but it appears the frequency of asking questions about the other is about the same in all categories.

on reason; although it can be followed, a precedent can be overruled if earlier decisions on which they were based are thought to be unjust. Therefore a precedent is different from experience, customs (although these two can overlap), and rules: experience is a personal or communal but general idea about how something has been done before; a rule (or law) is a standard which is officially organized and usually binding; and a custom derives from a supposedly ancient source. In contrast, a precedent is a particular instance or case from the past which merely provides a guideline about the future in the present.[68] It can come from an ancient source, but this is not necessary.

While precedents were occasionally found in Roman divinatory practice, possibly in a source such as Livy 8.18.12,[69] an interesting contrast can be found between the materials from Greece and Mesopotamia—which will be the content of the following paragraphs.

From Classical times, use of precedents was common in a number of Greek areas of thought. "The precedent [...] may have served [...] to provide an aura of consistency to a system that was all too unpredictable."[70] Predicting, or prognosticating about, the future was used in the practice of ancient medicine. This calls to mind the method of prognosis favoured by the Hippocratics. To practise this method, an ancient Greek doctor needed to be familiar with precedents, in this case previous patients diagnosed with the same illness—past case studies. Non-binding precedent

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[68] N. Duxbury, *The nature and authority of precedent* (Cambridge 2008) 1–20.

[69] Liv. 8.18.11–12: Prodigii ea res loco habita captisque magis mentibus quam conscelerati similis uisa; itaque memoria ex annalibus repetita in secessionibus quondam plebis clauum ab dictatore fixum alienatas[que] discordia mentes hominum eo piaculo compotes sui fecisse, dictatorem claui figendi causa creari placuit.

[70] A. Lanni, 'Arguing from "precedent": modern perspectives on Athenian practice' in: E.M. Harris & L. Rubinstein (eds), *The law and the courts in ancient Greece* (London 2004) 159–171, at 167–168. Some Greek words could be translated as 'precedent', most notably *paradeigma*, although this is not usually used in our strict sense of the word as stated above. *Paradeigma* is usually translated as pattern or model, exemplar, precedent, argument, proof from example. What *is* interesting about the word *paradeigma* is that it is first used in literature in the Classical period. We might find a watershed here, showing a diachronic change in the way the past was used. The orators did use it in 'our way', e.g., Lys. *Or.* 25.23; for an example from the law courts of ancient Greece see Lycurg. *Contra Leocrates* 9: παρεῖσθαι δὲ τὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν τοιούτων τιμωρίαν συμβέβηκεν, ὦ ἄνδρες, οὐ διὰ ῥᾳθυμίαν τῶν τότε νομοθετούντων, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μήτ' ἐν τοῖς πρότερον χρόνοις γεγενῆσθαι τοιοῦτον μηδὲν μήτ' ἐν τοῖς μέλλουσιν ἐπίδοξον εἶναι γενήσεσθαι. ("The reason why the penalty for such offences, gentlemen, has never been recorded is not that the legislators of the past were neglectful; it is that such things had not happened hitherto and were not expected to happen in the future." Translation: J.O. Burtt.)

was also used in political or juridical speeches. Past cases would be used to point out similarities—and differences—in comparison to the present case, arguing for a decision on punishment similar to, or different from, that handed down in the case used as a precedent. Lysias states: "you ought therefore, gentlemen, to take the events of the past as your example in resolving on the future course of things."[71]

Use of precedent in the interpretative part of the divinatory process cannot be explicitly proven in the Greek world until the second century AD, because the sources are not usually explicit about the basis on which the interpretation took place. Take, for example, the following passage from the *Iliad*: "even as he (Ajax) thus spake, there flew forth a bird upon the right hand, an eagle of lofty flight; and thereat the host of the Achaeans shouted aloud, heartened by the omen."[72] Interpretation of this sign is, as far as we can tell, based on experience: good was expected to follow this sign.

Matters are clearer when the work of Artemidoros is considered. He claims that all the dreams he has noted down in his books had actually occurred and that his books have been, at least partly, composed on the basis of precedent: "[…] I have patiently listened to old dreams and their consequences. For there was no other possible way in which to get practice in these matters. As a result, from the superabundance of examples, I am able to discuss each individually [more than anyone might have expected] so as to speak the truth without nonsense […]."[73] He chose to use those precedents which he had heard first hand: these were the most

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[71] Lys. *Or.* 25.23. Translation W.R.M. Lamb. χρὴ τοίνυν, ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, τοῖς πρότερον γεγενημένοις παραδείγμασι χρωμένους βουλεύεσθαι περὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἔσεσθαι. Lanni, 'Arguing from "precedent" ', *passim*; A.P. Dorjahn, 'Legal precedent in Athenian courts', *APhA* 58 (1927) xxviii–xxix; Clarke, *Making time for the past*, 274–286.

[72] Hom. *Il.* 13.821–823. Translation A.T. Murray. Ὣς ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις | αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης· ἐπὶ δ' ἴαχε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν | θάρσυνος οἰωνῷ·' See also Homer *Il.* 24.290–295. Translation A.T. Murray: Ἀλλ' εὔχεο σύ γ' ἔπειτα κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίωνι | Ἰδαίῳ, ὅς τε Τροίην κατὰ πᾶσαν ὁρᾶται, | αἴτει δ' οἰωνὸν ταχὺν ἄγγελον, ὅς τέ οἱ αὐτῷ | φίλτατος οἰωνῶν, καί εὐ κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον, | δεξιόν, ὄφρά μιν αὐτὸς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας | τῷ πίσυνος ἐπὶ νῆας ἴῃς Δαναῶν ταχυπώλων. ("Thereafter make thou prayer unto the son of Cronos, lord of the dark clouds, the god of Ida, that looketh down upon all the land of Troy, and ask of him a bird of omen, even the swift messenger that to himself is dearest of birds and is mightiest in strength; let him appear upon thy right hand, to the end that marking the sign with thine own eyes, thou mayest have trust therein, and go thy way to the ships of the Danaans of fleet steeds.")

[73] Artem. 1 Prooemium 41–46. Translation: White, *Interpretation of dreams*, 13–14. […] καὶ πολυανθρωποτάταις ὑπομένων ἀκούειν παλαιοὺς ὀνείρους καὶ τούτων τὰς ἀποβάσεις· οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἄλλως χρήσασθαι τῇ κατὰ ταῦτα γυμνασίᾳ. ὅθεν μοι περιγέγονεν ἐκ περιουσίας ἔχειν

reliable ones in his opinion. In Artemidoros' case his purpose was to make the precedents accessible, but simultaneously to formalize them to some extent, thereby providing a guideline for other dream-interpreters to use.

From the examples given above a Greek development towards the use of interpretative precedent can be cautiously discerned—bearing in mind the possibility that precedents might have begun to be used some considerable time before the first explicit reference to such a practice—when considering the non-divinatory evidence, it might even be that divinatory precedent started to be used in Classical times.

The so-called 'historical' omens in Mesopotamia (partly) functioned on the basis of precedent: they indicated particular signs which had announced important occurrences in the past. Cogently, trainee-experts were taught the art of extispicy using model livers which were at least partly constructed on the basis of previous findings. This having been said, the historical omens and liver models were a relatively small body of texts and objects which were used on very particular occasions. Their role in divination was small compared to that of the Neo-Assyrian compendia, the systematic nature of which has been discussed before. This systematization means that the future in Neo-Assyrian Empire was based on something other than precedents. Precedents could well have been the basis for the very first compendia, but by the first millennium the compendia had evolved into something quite different—a formalized list of every possible sign imaginable. The institutionalized position of divination and scholarship in general permitted this formalization and systematization of compendia. Systematization disconnected the prediction of the future from knowledge of the past: in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia, interpretation became timeless.

Two developments may cautiously be discerned, then: Greek use of experience became use of precedent; Mesopotamian use of experience or precedent became radical systematization. While in Greece the past came to be seen as a reliable basis for a current interpretation, in Mesopotamia explicit use of the past did not seem to do anymore and theory became a necessity.[74]

περὶ ἑκάστου λέγειν [πλείονα μὲν ἢ προσδοκήσαι ἄν τις] οὕτως ὡς αὐτὰ τἀληθῆ λέγοντα μὴ φλυαρεῖν [...].

[74] Cf. the grounds for recognition of the sign on pp. 125–132.

Concluding Observations

Divination was organized and, to an extent, even restricted by existing conceptions of time. There were certain divinatory activities which needed to take place at a particular time of day or on a specific date. The interpretation of signs observed during divination was influenced by conceptions of time: a sign could have a different meaning, depending on the time of day at which or the date on which it occurred. Divination also illuminates existing conceptions of time. It has been noted that divination functioned to find time: the right time. On this account, in all three cultural areas, time was conceived as non-homogeneous.

All in all, Mesopotamian divination can be described as a tool used to explicitly consider a future which could work as a 'telescope' in time, from the present into the future focusing on a specific point in time. The future could be seen through the timeless lens of divination: to some extent time appears to have been made permeable by means of divination. In Greece, we do not see such a focus in time—time horizons are usually left implicit and we can only infer which kinds of time horizons they were concerned with. It can be assumed, however, that this restricted space would normally not be wider than in Mesopotamia. In Rome, time was also left implicit but we know that divination served to analyse a very narrow space of time in close proximity to the individual in past, present and future.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY

How did ancient individuals deal with their uncertainties about past, present and future? Such uncertainties certainly existed in the mind of ancient man. They must have played an important part in daily life, as they are central to most human decisions and actions. What was the ancient day-to-day response to uncertainty? Part of the answer is certainly: using divination.

The following enquiry into the relationship between ancient uncertainties and divination touches upon wider issues of ancient dealings with uncertainty and provides an insight into this function of divination. In its turn, this nuances the way the ancient world is sometimes depicted—as a place whose inhabitants considered themselves to be in the grip of inescapable fate.[1]

Conceptions of fate in the ancient world have been a frequent topic of discussion—in both ancient and modern times—, but again usually philosophers have left us their ideas on this subject.[2] The particulars of the relationship between divination and fate have been the subject of much

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[1] See, e.g., A. Giddens, *Runaway world: how globalization is reshaping our lives* (London 1999) 40–41. It must be conceded that, owing to the limited space assigned to the ancient world in future studies, nuance is often impossible to provide. For an example of a publication which does devote a reasonable amount of space to ancient futures but does not avoid the pitfalls as laid down above see B. Adam & C. Groves, *Future matters: action, knowledge, ethics* (Leiden 2007). While I greatly appreciate their theory and their ideas, they are based on rather too general conceptions of what ancient futures were like and how they were handled.

[2] See for two recent volumes paying attention to the complementary and clashing roles of the gods and fate in Greece and Rome: Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 218–220; E. Eidinow, *Luck, fate and fortune: antiquity and its legacy* (London 2011) 30–44. Some titles on fate in the Graeco-Roman world are W.E. Heitland, *The Roman fate: an essay in interpretation* (Cambridge 1922); idem, *Iterum, a further discussion on Roman fate* (Cambridge 1925); P.E. Eberhard, *Das Schicksal als poetische Idee bei Homer* (Paderborn 1923); E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 2–27; B.C. Dietrich, *Death, fate and the gods: the development of a religious idea in Greek popular belief and in Homer* (London 1965); W.C. Greene, *Moira: fate, good, and evil in Greek thought* (Cambridge, MA 1944); E. Sarischoulis, *Schicksal, Götter und Handlungsfreiheit in den Epen Homers* (Stuttgart 2008). On fate and divination in Mesopotamia see Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination', 363–371; but also J.N. Lawson, *The concept of fate in ancient Mesopotamia of the first millennium: toward an understanding of Šimtu* (Wiesbaden 1994); Polonsky, *The rise of the sun god*.

debate by modern scholars. J.N. Lawson explains the apparent paradox as follows: "the only way in which one can 'divine' what the future holds is for the future to be *pre*determined. Yet, once one knows what is predetermined in one's future, then there exists the possibility of avoiding or changing it."[3] As we shall see, this statement needs to be nuanced: in the three cultural areas the function of divination was in many cases not to find out what was predetermined. Predictability of the future and fate are two issues which will recur repeatedly.

Although I have used the word 'uncertainty', current scholarship concerned with assessing the way in which ancient individuals thought about, and dealt with, the future, has a tendency to focus on the concept of 'risk'. In his *Risk and survival in ancient Greece: reconstructing the rural domestic economy*, Thomas Gallant is essentially using the term in an etic sense when he argues that "[…] Greek peasants developed an extensive but delicate web of risk-management strategies".[4] The term has also been used in its etic sense by various other scholars, as among them Peter Garnsey, Jerry Toner and Esther Eidinow.[5] On account of the modern preoccupation with risk, perhaps it is not strange that this concept has been introduced into studies of the ancient world. For the purposes of our enquiries, it is essential to determine whether 'risk' really is a useful concept in analysing the role of divination as a tool for thinking about uncertainties in the ancient world. This takes us into the field of future studies and related subjects.

Risk?

Uncertainty is created by everything humans do not or cannot know. Humans can thrive on uncertainty because they experience hope and even fear as stimulating emotions. Paradoxically, simultaneously every attempt is made to diminish that same uncertainty because it is necessary to have some idea or conception of the future if one is to make up

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[3] Lawson, *The concept of fate*, 79.

[4] T.W. Gallant, *Risk and survival in ancient Greece: reconstructing the rural domestic economy* (Cambridge 1991) ix, *passim*; see for an earlier use of the term risk by Gallant: T.W. Gallant, 'Crisis and response: risk-buffering behaviour in Hellenistic Greek communities', *JIH* 19 (1989) 393–413.

[5] P. Garnsey, *Famine and food supply in the Graeco-Roman world: responses to risk and crisis* (Cambridge 1988) *passim*; J. Toner, *Popular culture in ancient Rome* (Cambridge 2009) 11–53, especially 12; Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk, passim*, especially 22.

one's mind about which actions to take.[6] Therefore, generally speaking, the attitude of most humans towards uncertainty is ambivalent. Even if humans accept the fact that they cannot estimate or predict the future by means of rational thought (and would probably be unhappy if they could!), they will still attempt to do so—anything is better than complete and utter uncertainty.[7]

In modern Western society, risk and uncertainty are inextricably connected:[8] there are risky uncertainties as well as uncertain risks.[9] Closer inspection reveals that risk is a sub-category of uncertainty. Uncertainty is always present, but some uncertain situations are also risks.[10] There are no risks which are not uncertain: death, for example, is not considered a risk—it is a certainty (the only question is *when* it will happen, not *that* it will happen).[11] Modern man thinks about most uncertainties almost automatically in terms of risk, but this is by no means a standard or natural way of thinking: risk is a human construct.

What does the term 'risk' mean and where does it differ from 'uncertainty'? Whereas uncertainty can be roughly defined as coming from anything yet unknown, risk is usually thought to be *quantified* uncertainty and is used to refer to situations in which the probabilities of the occurrence

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[6] It appears that uncertainty is what upsets people most, even in extreme situations. Research into serious illness has found that, at least in the case of a test to find out whether or not individuals have the gene for Huntington's disease, people were actually less upset when the test indicated that they had the gene than if the test proved inconclusive: R. Hastie & R.M. Dawes, *Rational choice in an uncertain world: the psychology of judgment and decision making* (London 2010[2]) 331–332.

[7] In a game environment, "despite feedback through a thousand trials, even when the subjects are *explicitly told* that only the base rate prediction is relevant—the sequence is random with no repetitive patters—subjects cannot bring themselves to believe that the situation is one in which they *cannot* predict" (Hastie & Dawes, *Rational choice*, 323).

[8] On risk and uncertainty as two sides of the same coin: M.B.A. van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk: the PRIMA approach to decision support* (Boston 2000) 205; also 206–226.

[9] M.B.A. van Asselt, 'Onzekere risico's en riskante onzekerheden' in: E. Vos & G. van Calster (eds), *Risico en voorzorg in de rechtsmaatschappij* (Antwerpen 2004) 1–16, at 3; M.B.A. van Asselt & L. Smits, 'Onzekere risico's: de ontdekking van rekenen met kansen' in: J.P.M. Geraedts, M.B.A. van Asselt & L. Koenen (eds), *Leven met onzekerheid: cahier bio-wetenschappen en maatschappij* (Leiden 2008) 5–11, at 8.

[10] WRR rapport, *Onzekere veiligheid: verantwoordelijkheden rond fysieke veiligheid* (Amsterdam 2008) 113–115. On uncertain risks see M.B.A. van Asselt & O. Renn, 'Risk governance', *JRR* 14 (2011) 431–449; G. de Vries, I. Verhoeven & M. Boeckhout, 'Taming uncertainty: the WRR approach to risk governance', *JRR* 14 (2011) 485–499, at 489–491.

[11] Religion might be an additional factor: early Christians and those polytheists who believed in an afterlife might have thought differently about this matter. However, everyone can agree that at least the body will die and that this is a certainty—whatever happens afterwards.

of an event are known and the consequences of an event can be—or are attempted to be—estimated. These consequences are assessed by societal norms and values and this judgment decides to what degree the risk is considered positive or negative.[12] When enough is known about the two factors of probability and consequences of the occurrence, uncertainty becomes a calculated risk which can be assessed and managed. In other words: "risk refers to hazards that are actively assessed in relation to future possibilities."[13] Risk assessment and management are not carried out on an incidental basis: they are a systematic way of dealing with hazards, dangers or chances (and often communally). Having said this, it bears repeating that risk always remains a construct: we quantify uncertainties on an uncertain basis. Uncertainty cannot be completely quantified or anticipated—otherwise it would become a certainty—and uncertainty is an inherent component of risk (as the world 'probability' already implies).[14] After the assessment of a risk, its management can commence: risk management is a conscious strategy adopted on the basis of a prior assessment.

The way individuals deal with uncertainty has undergone great changes over time.[15] The first developments in the direction of our kind of risk society appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Spanish and Portuguese began to use the term which would become the

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[12] For a (modern) example of how different people of different gender, age and class can experience risk see J. Tulloch & D. Lupton, *Risk and everyday life* (London 2003) 17–40. Positive attitudes toward risks: S. Lyng, *Edgework: the sociology of risk-taking* (London 2005), *passim*; S. Lyng, 'Edgework, risk and uncertainty' in: J.O. Zinn (ed.), *Social theories of risk and uncertainty: an introduction* (Malden, MA 2008) 106–137; P. Slovic, *The feeling of risk: new perspectives on risk perception* (London 2010); more historical is: R. Brenner & G.A. Brenner, *Gambling and speculation: a theory, a history, and a future of some human decisions* (Cambridge 1990) 19–48; and more psychological: G.M. Breakwell, *The psychology of risk* (Cambridge 2007). Cf. Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 152; I. Starr & C. Whipple, 'Risks of risk decisions', *Science* 208 (1980) 1114–1119.

[13] Giddens, *Runaway world*, 40. And in the form of a formula—which goes back to Frank Knight: risk = $\text{probability}_{\text{event}}$ x $\text{damage}_{\text{event.}}$ Knight's seminal work is: F.H. Knight, *Risk, uncertainty and profit* (Boston 1921). Cf. J.O. Zinn, 'Introduction' in: idem (ed.), *Social theories of risk and uncertainty: an introduction* (Malden, MA 2008) 1–17, at 5. This formula has been rightly criticized because it makes risk assessment look like a simple sum (although the header 'damage' does take a certain subjectivism into account and can, according to many, also consist of 'chances'), which is not the case—although it is often treated like this in practice. For explicit criticism on Knight's formula and its use see M.B.A. van Asselt, *Risk governance: over omgaan met onzekerheid en mogelijke toekomsten* (Maastricht 2007) 18–20; Van Asselt & Renn, 'Risk governance', 436–438.

[14] Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 81–82; Van Asselt, 'Onzekere risico's en riskante onzekerheden', 1–16.

[15] For a concise introduction see D. Lupton, *Risk* (New York 1999) 17–35.

English 'risk' in a spatial sense: it meant that a ship was sailing uncharted waters.[16] It was later used in a temporal sense, referring to the quantified uncertainties about the future.[17] Anthony Giddens, among others, says it is this embrace of risk which has created and indeed enabled the modern world—the way man thinks about himself, the globalization of the world and the widespread presence of capitalism. Ulrich Beck and Giddens consider modern society one in which the main aim is to minimize risk, a term which in our world is virtually equated with danger although this is by no means a given (as will be discussed).[18] The 'risk society' is something which is particular to the modern world.[19]

The modern use of risk, which is deeply rooted in probabilistic thought, contrasts markedly with experiences in the ancient world.[20] From an emic angle, ancient risk-vocabulary is non-existent, whereas from an etic angle, quantifications of uncertainty and application of risk-thinking are

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16 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 21–23. See for a somewhat earlier date I. Wilkinson, *Anxiety in a risk society* (London 2001) 92. The etymology of the word is disputed. One theory is as follows: "ultimately it [the word risk] may be derived from the Arabic word *risq* which means riches or good fortune. However, where there is also an attempt to recover its origins in the Greek word *rhiza*, meaning 'cliff', and the Latin *resecare*, meaning 'to cut off short", John Ayto suggests that risk might be understood to have its semantic roots embedded in a maritime vocabulary as a term invoking the perils of sailing too close to inshore rocks (Wilkinson, *Anxiety*, 91).

17 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 21–23.

18 U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash, *Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (Cambridge 1994) 45; A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age* (London 1991) 109–143. On Beck and Giddens see also Lupton, *Risk*, 58–83. There is a second approach to the theme of risk, as sketched by Lupton, the so-called 'governmentality' paradigm, partly based on ideas of Michel Foucault, which is basically concerned with governmental control of risks for society as a whole. The third paradigm is that of Mary Douglas, which is usually referred to as 'cultural/symbolic' paradigm. Risk is supposed to serve as a tool by means of which a particular danger can be managed. Ambiguity is seen to be a danger to the stability of society. This means that "[…] 'risk' may be understood as the cultural response to transgression" (Lupton, *Risk*, 45). Cf. M. Douglas, *Risk acceptability according to the social sciences* (New York 1985); M. Douglas & A. Wildavsky, *Risk and culture: an essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers* (Berkeley 1982) 186–198. Lupton states that one of the main problems with this theory is "[…] the idea of risk is transcribed simply as unacceptable danger" (M. Douglas, *Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory* (London 1992) 39).

19 The 'risk society' is a term used by Anthony Giddens and also by Ulrich Beck ('Risikogesellschaft': U. Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 1986) *passim*) to qualify modern society. A brief summary and critique can be found in N. Huls, 'Recht en veiligheid in de risicomaatschappij' in: E. Vos & G. van Calster (eds), *Risico en voorzorg in de rechtsmaatschappij* (Antwerpen 2004) 31–43, at 31–33.

20 See for an recent publication in the field of ancient history in which probability is argued not to have existed in the ancient world, but the author still attempts 'to re-create an "embedded" discourse of risk' in the ancient materials: M. Beard, 'Risk and the humanities' in: L. Skinns, M. Scott & T. Cox (eds), *Risk* (Cambridge 2011) 85–108, at 90–91.

not present either.[21] To illustrate this, first an investigation into theoretical ideas about chance and probability is required.

Mesopotamian mathematics was a very well-developed branch of science, but innocent of specific calculations of chance or of probability.[22] In Greece, some elementary reflections of a probabilistic kind can be found in Aristotle:

> To succeed in many things, or many times, is difficult; for instance, to repeat the same throw ten thousand times with the dice would be impossible, whereas to make it once or twice is comparatively easy.[23]

In Rome we do come across some attempts to think about the future in terms of calculated chance, odds and probability: Cicero (perhaps on the basis of Aristotle!) thought about the problem of certain knowledge and the probability of certainty. He provides 'calculations on chance' for dicing, albeit only very basic ones: they express the thought that if one throws the knucklebones a hundred times, it is not possible to obtain the highest throw all the time:

> Four dice are cast and a Venus throw results—that is chance; but do you think it would be chance, too, if in one hundred casts you made one hundred Venus throws?[24]

Or in another passage:

> Nothing is so uncertain as a cast of dice and yet there is no one who plays often who does not sometimes make a Venus-throw and occasionally twice or thrice in succession.[25]

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[21] For example, the Greek world *kindunos* has many times been translated as risk or something similar, but in its strict sense this word means 'danger'. The translation of *kindunos* as risk reveals more about modern ways of thinking about danger than about those in the Greek world.

[22] There is no discussion of probabilistic thinking in E. Robson, *Mathematics in ancient Iraq: a social history* (Princeton 2008) and K.R. Nemet-Nejad, *Cuneiform mathematical texts as a reflection of everyday life in Mesopotamia* (New Haven 2003) although, this last work, contains a discussion of the way interest was calculated—but, although thoughts about representing percentages can be seen here, this is not the same as probabilistic thinking. In a personal communication, E. Robson confirmed the idea that probabilistic thinking was non-existent in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia (15-09-2011).

[23] Arist. *Cael.* 292a28–30. Translation by W.K.C. Guthrie. Ἔστι δὲ τὸ κατορθοῦν χαλεπὸν ἢ τὸ πολλὰ ἢ τὸ πολλάκις, οἷον μυρίους ἀστραγάλους Χίους βαλεῖν ἀμήχανον, ἀλλ᾽ ἕνα ἢ δύο ῥᾳ̂ον.

[24] Cic. *Div.* 1.13.23. Translation: W.A. Falconer. Quattuor tali iacti casu Venerium efficiunt; num etiam centum Venerios, si quadringentos talos ieceris, casu futuros putas?

[25] Cic. *Div.* 2.59.121. Translation: W.A. Falconer. Quid est tam incertum quam talorum iactus? Tamen nemo est, quin saepe iactans Venerium iaciat aliquando, non numquam etiam iterum ac tertium.

It seems unlikely that Cicero was the only person to think about these issues, but no Roman theory of probability has come down to us: ancient man simply did not reason in this way.[26] Furthermore, it should be noted that experts in probability theory are disinclined to see the elementary ideas expressed by Aristotle and Cicero as true probability theory in the modern sense.[27] For all these reasons it seems a safe inference to assume that the idea of risk or its management is not convincingly attested in the three ancient cultural areas under consideration.

Second, practical applications of thinking about future occurrences might be investigated. Some would perhaps see the redistributive aspect of the Mesopotamian economic system as contributing, in part at least, to some form of risk management. For example, the provision of food seems to have been more structurally organized than in Greece or Rome.[28] The supply of water seems to have been subjected to some sort of organization in all three cultural areas.[29] Furthermore, all of the areas had systems to

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[26] Why the mathematics of chance were not developed in the ancient world is unknown—there are plenty of theories which ascribe this to an ancient sense of determinism, reliance on the supernatural, a lack of empirical examples and a lack of stimulus from economic developments which would have necessitated probability theories: I. Hacking, *The emergence of probability: a philosophical study of early ideas about probability, induction and statistical inference* (Cambridge 1975) 3–5.

[27] P.M. Lee, 'History of probability theory' in: T. Rudas (ed.), *Handbook of probability: theory and applications* (Los Angeles 2008) 3–14, at 3–4; modern development of chance: I. Hacking, *The taming of chance* (Cambridge 1990).

[28] All in all, although some efforts were made, it is hard to speak of a real safeguard for the community. Cf. W. Jongman & R. Dekker, 'Public intervention in the food supply in pre-Industrial Europe' in: P. Halstead & J. O'Shea (eds), *Bad year economics: cultural responses to risk and uncertainty* (Cambridge 1989) 114–122. For more on (especially) soldiers' rations see L. Foxhall & H.A. Forbes, '*Sitometreia*: the role of grain as a staple food in classical antiquity', *Chiron* 12 (1982) 41–90, *passim*; P. Garnsey, 'Grain for Athens' in: P.A. Cartledge & F.D. Harvey (eds), *Crux: essays presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th birthday* (Exeter 1985) 62–75. See for other ways of obtaining food Gallant, *Risk and survival*, 179–182. In Rome, mass storage, distribution and price regulation were definitely available—although import was never fully regulated by the State, contracts were handed out to individuals who supplied grain to the city. On historical develpopments: Garnsey, *Famine and food supply*, 188–268; P. Garnsey, 'Grain for Rome' in: P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins & C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade in the ancient economy* (London 1983) 118–130, at 126–128; B. Sirks, 'Supplying Rome: safeguarding the system' in: E. Papi (ed.), *Supplying Rome and the Empire: the Proceedings of an International Seminar Held at Siena-Certosa di Pontignano on May 2–4, 2004, on Rome, the Provinces, Production and Distribution* (Portsmouth, RI 2007) 173–178.

[29] There is a plethora of literature on water and its supply. For Rome see R. Taylor, *Public needs and private pleasures: water distribution, the Tiber river and the urban development of ancient Rome* (Rome 2000); G. de Kleijn-Eijkelestam, *The water supply of ancient Rome: city area, water, and population* (Amsterdam 2001). For Greece see D.P. Crouch, *Water management in ancient Greek cities* (Oxford 1993) 19–39. For Mesopotamia see *RlA*

spread the costs of the investors were a ship or caravan to founder or be robbed.[30] Flexible interest rates on grain—depending on the season—were also known. These have been claimed to be the prime examples of the existence of 'risk' in the ancient world. Nonetheless, all these expressions of thinking about the future differ crucially from modern conceptions of risk: there was no calculation of the chances or probabilities of disaster or success.[31]

If he did not calculate 'risk', how *did* ancient man think about his uncertain future and how might this thinking be explored? Anthony Giddens draws a contrast between the modern world and anything which came before by characterizing the latter as living in the past and using its ideas about the supernatural and fate in order to think about uncertainties in the future—because pre-modern man did not have the concept of risk as a tool for thinking about uncertainties.[32] These generalizations are perhaps based upon similar remarks made by scholars of the ancient world, among them the claim that the "unpredictability of the future [. . .] makes

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s.v. 'ilku' and S.W. Cole & H. Gasche, 'Second- and first-millennium BC rivers in northern Babylonia' in: H. Gasche & M. Tanret (eds), *Changing watercourses in Babylonia: towards a reconstruction of the ancient environment in Lower Mesopotamia* (Ghent 1998) 1–64; Codex Hammurabi 55, 56, 260.

[30] An example is the system of the Greek marine insurance loans ('bottomry'), first appearing between 475 and 450 BC. These insurance loans were a loan to the captain to buy his cargo. If he lost his goods for some reason, he did not have to repay the loan. At least two or three people involved were in this system: captain, ship-owner (who might also have been the captain) and lender. The shipper would borrow money from the lender and make an agreement with a ship-owner to use his ship (unless the captain was also the ship owner). If he did not return, he would not have to repay his debt; if he did, he would have to pay a very high interest: L. Casson, *Ancient mariners: seafarers and sea fighters of the Mediterranean in ancient times* (London 1959) 102–103; P. Millett, 'Maritime loans and the structure of credit in fourth-century Athens' in: P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins & C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade in the ancient economy* (London 1983) 36–52, at 36; C.M. Reed, *Maritime traders in the ancient Greek world* (Cambridge 2003) 34. In practice, these sums of money functioned both as a loan—to enable the borrower to buy cargo and set sail—and an insurance—to spread the damage should disaster strike. See Finley and De Ste. Croix as discussed in Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 17 (and see the references to the primary materials she gives). During Mesopotamian overland trading ventures, a few different individuals shared the monetary responsibility, as is well known from the sources (K. Radner, 'Traders in the Neo-Assyrian empire' in: J.G. Dercksen (ed.), *Trade and finance in ancient Mesopotamia: proceedings of the first MOS symposium (Leiden 1997)* (Istanbul 1999) 101–126, at 116–118; L. Graslin-Thomé, *Les échanges à longue distance en Mésopotamie au Ier millénaire: une approche économique* (Paris 2009) 405–414). Nevertheless, both in Greece and in Mesopotamia the systems were not based on the mathematics of chance, but on experience—and hence it was ultimately intuitive.

[31] Contra Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 17, and see her references. Instead, these bottomry loans were uncertainty management.

[32] Giddens, *Runaway world*, 40–41.

the past more relevant".[33] Nevertheless, on the basis of the ancient evidence, the first part of Giddens' statement seems especially rash. Ancient man did not live primarily in the past and the future *was* thought about in very explicit ways: apart from a consciousness of time and its components (including the future, see pp. 173–174), the mere existence—let alone the prevalence—of at least partly future-oriented religious phenomena such as divination, curses or sacrifice suggests that the ancient future was thought about pretty intensively. The fact, however, that these religious activities were the strategies used most widely by the various people of the ancient world to deal with the future, does back up the second part of Giddens' statement.[34] It confirms that ancient man sought the guidance of the supernatural for these dealings pertaining to the, not necessarily predetermined, future. Ancient man wanted to be able to think about and influence or 'manage' the uncertain future and for this purpose sought information from the supernatural—especially by means of divination.

To sum up: certainly the term 'risk' cannot be found in emic use nor should it be applied to the ancient materials etically. 'Risk' is so ingrained in the probabilistic thinking of modern Western man that, almost by default, he projects this kind of thinking onto the ancient world.[35] Nevertheless, ancient man did lessen uncertainty by trying to obtain perceived information from the supernatural. What risk assessment does for modern man, was what divination did for ancient man: both risk assessment and divination are thought to reduce uncertainty.

Ancient Uncertainty

Uncertainty about What?

Ancient individuals were uncertain about a number of issues: both private matters, political dilemmas and the field of religion have lent themselves to a great number of divinatory enquiries. Still, all sorts of themes occur. When we want to categorize these, we could take Joseph Fontenrose's three simple categories which he used to create order in the Delphic

[33] J. Grethlein, 'Divine, human and poetic time in Pindar, *Pythian* 9', *Mnemosyne* 64 (2011) 383–409, at 401.

[34] Excluding the likes of philosophers, some of whom had very specific ideas on these matters.

[35] See for similar thoughts, although by means of different reasoning, Beard, 'Risk and the humanities', 91. I do, however, not agree with Beard's idea that the Romans lived in an aleatory society. Cf. this chapter n. 55.

materials. Together, his categories cover all themes: *res divinae* (cult foundation, sacrifices and religious laws), *res publicae* (rulership, legislation, interstate relations and war), *res domesticae et profanae* (birth, marriage, death, careers, actions, *etcetera*).[36]

Yet, we may want to be a bit more specific than that and also focus on the Greek individual. Taking Lhôte's edition of tablets from Dodona we find the following categories of uncertainties.[37] First, those of a socio-economic nature: issues are a good harvest, whether bills should be paid, about goods and possessions, which job to choose and whether the person will be successful in that job, about buying and selling.[38] Second, and connected to the first category, is happiness/success. Individuals ask how they should achieve success, whether they will be happy, if it is a good idea to do something, which road a person should choose, how to gain results, whether an individual should spend energy resolving an issue.[39] A, third, related category is the question of where to settle and live: whether a person should stay or move, or should travel.[40] Fourth, on love, marriage and children: issues are the good of the family, begetting children, whether the person will be happy in marriage with his wife, whether the person should find another wife, about arranging marriages of his children.[41] Fifth, dealing with rules and institutions: asking for justice, about requesting civil rights.[42] Sixth, religion: whether to use a necromancer, to request another

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[36] J.E. Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle: its responses and operations: with a catalogue of responses* (London 1978) Appendix B II, 438–440.

[37] A number of questions need to be omitted here: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6b, 7, 8b, 9, 11, 14 because they are asked by communities (their topics are questions about safety for the community, general prosperity, a good harvest, maintenance of the temple and the possessions of the community). There are also a number of questions that are too fragmentary to use here: 4, 12, 24, 31, 40, 42, 61A, 70, 79, 113?, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156, 161, 162, 164, 165, 166, 167, 140, 142.

[38] A good harvest: 77, 78. Which job to do: 74, 75, 76, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89Aa, 90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96A, 97?, 98, 99, 100, 102, 103, 105, 106A, 106B, 111, 141 Bb. Gaining results: 17. Should the bill be paid: 96b. Goods and possessions: 28A, 28b, 58B, 65, 115, 116, 117, 118. Buying and selling: 101, 109, 110.

[39] Spend energy resolving an issue: 112. Gaining happiness/success: 10b, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22a, 23, 33b, 35a, 37, 49bis, 65, 67, 81, 107A, 108. Unhappiness: 158. Is it good to do something? 163.

[40] Where to settle or live? 6b, 46Bb, 50B, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58A, 59, 60?, 62, 63, 64, 68B, 92, 130, 131, 132, 133, 157, 160. To travel: 86. Which road to choose: 154.

[41] The good of the family: 8a. Begetting children: 15, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46a, 47, 48, 49, 50Aa, 51, 52, 140, 141A. Being happy in marriage with their wife: 22 Bb, 22ba, 25, 26, 27, 36A, 52, 53Aa?, 53Bb. Seeking another wife? 29, 30, 32, 33a, 34, 35b, 36Bb. Arranging marriages of children 38, 39, 53Ac.

[42] Requesting civil rights: 61B. Justice: 16, 141bis, 159.

oracle, and so forth.[43] Seventh, on matters of health.[44] Eight, matters of warfare/military.[45] And last, about finding out the truth about past and present.[46]

In Mesopotamia most attested questions (the queries from the king) would have fitted into Fontenrose's second category, of *res publicae*. The sources provide information about public divination: every question addressed to the sun god was—directly or indirectly—concerned with the well-being of the land. Questions relating to the person of royal individuals also belong in this category because they are concerned with the well-being of the ruler or those close to him, and hence that of his realm. Detailed information about the questions asked during private, unofficial, divination—which would perhaps fall into the other two categories distinguished by Fontenrose—is scarce but the private enquiries in *tamītu* texts shed light on matters.[47] Categories central in these private questions are religious matters,[48] health,[49] agriculture[50] and personal safety.[51] Naturally, there are some questions which do not fit into one of these categories: will a gift be accepted? Is this woman telling the truth?[52]

It is also possible to make some more detailed observations about the uncertainties of the king: there are questions about cultic matters, such as whether a statue of Marduk should be made. A very large part of the questions asked by the king revolves around decisions in war. Others are concerned with whom should be appointed in which official role, who should be appointed crown prince, political uprisings, royal marriages, survival of officials on a mission, and the important question whether or not a written plan should be carried out. The health of royals is a last important concern. It could, then, be argued that the uncertainties of the king were focused on matters of a military and political nature, medical, religious and administrative.[53]

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[43] 10a, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141B, 143, 144.
[44] 46Ba, 50Ab, 65, 66, 68A, 69, 71, 72, 73.
[45] 127, 128, 129.
[46] 107B, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 125bis, 126.
[47] Public questions can be seen in: 1, 4, 5, 6–8, 20, 24.
[48] 2, 3, 9–10 (public?), 18b.
[49] 12bc, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 25.
[50] 3, 11, 17, 24.
[51] 20, 21, 23.
[52] 12 and 21. Other questions that do not fall into a category are 1: will bad news be sent to a person; 18a: whether someone will be appointed; 19: whether a man is fateful to his master; 23: reliability of a messenger.
[53] As does Starr, *Queries, passim*. Cultic matters: e.g., SAA 4 200. For other cultic matters see, e.g., SAA 4 196; 4 262; war: e.g, SAA 4 11; appointments: e.g, SAA 4 150; 4 275; crown

Roman sources, too, deal mainly with public concerns, of which a glimpse can be gained: the nature of the three main methods of divination shows which uncertainties were diminished by using public divination. First and foremost, the *prodigia* show the fear of the displeasure of the gods. If these gods were not appeased, more bad things would happen and uncertainty about the future would increase. *Prodigia* are a cause for uncertainty and expiation takes the uncertainty away. It should be noted that *prodigia* are, in the end, recognized and acknowledged as such by man and should therefore be seen as markers of existing uncertainties. *Omina* reveal previously unknown impending negative events for individuals, but provide a forewarning so that precaution can be taken. The *auspicia* show a concern about new endeavors: should a particular action be undertaken and is this the right time for it? The *haruspices* could be concerned with finding information about the divine will through extispicy, especially in a military and sacrificial context: again, an important issue here is to find some sense of certainty that one is doing the right thing in accordance with the will of the gods.

A Grip on Uncertainty

Humans can attempt to get a grip on their uncertainties. In how far this works out is, naturally, always a subjective issue. There are different ways in which uncertainties can be perceived and, for the ancient world, these can be deduced by analysing the ways humans deal with uncertainty by means of divination. If divination functions on the basis of prediction, gaining knowledge of the future is seen as being possible. An individual thinks he can obtain information and this provides him with a sense of certainty. If, however, divination does not work predictively, the future is not seen as something that can be known, for instance because the future is seen as being based on chance.[54] Where chance is prevalent, uncertainty can, in the eyes of the individual, only be alleviated up to a certain point. The supernatural can provide advice on what would be the best

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prince: e.g., SAA 4 149; uprisings: e.g., SAA 4 321; marriage: e.g, SAA 4 20; officials on a mission: e.g., SAA 4 71; a written plan: e.g., SAA 4 129; health: e.g, SAA 4 188.

[54] Luck, accident and chance are concepts which are often used interchangeably. Both lucky and accidental events occur on the premise that there is a small chance that the event will take place. Hence, chance is the central concept—events which are perceived to depend on chance can be accidental (and the qualification 'lucky' means these accidental events are welcomed). For a discussion of a definition of luck see D. Pritchard, *Epistemic luck* (Oxford 2005) 125–144.

course to follow. It can do no more than suggest what is the best option at a specific moment. No guarantees are given. If the individual followed such advice and he appeared to be visited by misfortune, he could argue that, had he not followed the advice, things would have been worse.[55]

If the idea of chance is prevalent in a society, this points towards a different way of thinking about the occurrence of future events than would be the case in a society in which this idea is absent. If there is some sort of future that is not dependent on chance, this implies a different kind of uncertainty which should be reflected in the divinatory materials. Different ideas about uncertainty are linked to different conceptions of the future and of divination.

How should we see ideas concerning the existence of chance in the three cultural areas? This is pivotal for our understanding of uncertainties although it should be noted that there is no consistency in these beliefs. In Greece, we encounter the idea of *moira* from the Archaic Age onwards: *moira* was the 'allotted portion' in the life of an individual.[56] We also know that the earliest Greek horoscope—to which some idea of fate must be connected—dates from the third century BC. These two pieces of information already show that there was a notion of fate.[57] This statement can also be applied to Republican Rome where the Parcae personified the same idea as Greek Moira.[58] Despite the continuing existence of such concepts, it can be confidently stated that 'chance' became a more important and central conception in Classical and (even more so) Hellenistic Greece and also in Roman Italy from mid-Republican times. The sources suggest that in the Archaic period, *Moira* occupied a more important place, but that in later times the role of *Moira* "is somewhat superseded by *Tuche*".[59]

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[55] These kinds of uncertainty have also been called epistemical and aleatory. Yet, these concepts are intrinsically connected and interlinked in multiple ways. It is therefore unadvisable to use them as binary opposites. Aleatory uncertainty is based in randomness and diversity of all kinds. Epistemical uncertainty has to do with a lack of knowledge of any kind and on any basis. Cf. Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 86–87.

[56] I do not use the term *anagke*, 'necessity', as an independent factor here—*moira* is the main Greek term to focus on.

[57] On how the gods, fate and *moira* played complementary and clashing roles the references to H.S. Versnel and E. Eidinow in n. 2 of this chapter. The latter publication also discusses concepts related to *moira*.

[58] Among so many relevant publications see for an introduction S. Eitrem, 'Moira' in: *RE*, vol. 15, 2449–2497; Greene, *Moira*.

[59] Eidinow, *Luck*, 39. On Tyche's frequent appearances see the same volume, pages 45–52—Eidinow detects more literary appearances in the fifth century and the spread of cult in the fourth; G. Herzog-Hauser, 'Tyche' in: *RE*, vol. 7A, 1643–1689.

The combined literary, epigraphical and archaeological sources leave no doubt that both Tyche and Fortuna and the ideas they embodied were important in everyday life in Greece and Rome. In the Graeco-Roman world, chance was not only perceived as a force, it was also personified at least from early Hellenistic times onwards. The goddesses Fortuna and Tyche were powerful deities of chance, on whom depended both positive and negative events. In the first century AD, Pliny described the wide-ranging activities of Roman Fortuna as follows:

> For all over the world, in all places, and at all times, Fortune is the only god whom every one invokes; she alone is spoken of, she alone is accused and is supposed to be guilty; she alone is in our thoughts, is praised and blamed, and is loaded with reproaches; wavering as she is, conceived by the generality of mankind to be blind, wandering, inconstant, uncertain, variable, and often favouring the unworthy. To her are referred all our losses and all our gains, and in casting up the accounts of mortals she alone balances the two pages of our sheet [...].[60]

The goddesses Tyche and Fortuna were viewed as fickle, changeable, volatile and unpredictable by nature.[61] Despite such unreliability, in the Republican period Fortuna appears as a positive goddess.[62] Her Greek counterpart Tyche appears to have begun to be perceived a little more negatively over time, even though she also gained in importance.[63] Some have connected this rise to the fact that the structures of the *polis* became weaker towards, and in, the Hellenistic period, making life more uncertain, hence Tyche was perceived to be a stronger force. However, it would be unwise to rule out the possibility that there were other factors which contributed to Tyche's rise in importance.[64]

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[60] Plin. *NH* 2.5.22.3–10 Translation: John Bostock. Edition: Teubner. toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus Fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, rea una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur, volubilis....que, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque fautrix. huic omnia expensa, huic feruntur accepta, et in tota ratione mortalium sola utramque paginam facit [...].

[61] An article which discusses this overlap between the two goddesses is G. Herzog-Hauser, 'Tyche und Fortuna', *WSt* 63 (1948) 156–163.

[62] F. Graf, 'Fortuna' in: *NewP*. Visited 20-05-2010. Cf. W. Otto, 'Fortuna' in: *RE*, vol. 7, 12–42.

[63] See N. Johannsen, 'Tyche' in: *NewP*. Visited 20-05-2010. Apart from Eidinow, *Luck*, Tyche has recently received attention in Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 277–278. See also J.D. Mikalson, *Religion in Hellenistic Athens* (Berkeley 1998) 62–63; P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: the historical evolution of the Hellenistic age* (Berkeley 1990) 400–401. References to older works may be found in the bibliographies and footnotes of these works.

[64] A.A. Buriks, *Peri Tuches: de ontwikkeling van het begrip tyche tot aan de Romeinse tijd, hoofdzakelijk in de philosophie* (Leiden 1948) 2.

Chance is rather less visible in Mesopotamia—although the concept will have existed. It was not personified in the Mesopotamian pantheon.[65] Instead, most people in Mesopotamia appear to have believed in the existence of a knowable future which was perceived to have been arranged by the supernatural (made known to man through divinatory signs), but susceptible to tweaking by mankind through rituals, in a way which did not leave much room for chance occurrences. There seems to be no Babylonian or Assyrian word for chance, in the sense of a sudden occurrence.[66] One apparent exception is the term *egirrû*,[67] but this word was only used in a divinatory context for something which happened unexpectedly and does not seem to have been a general term for 'chance'. As we have seen, an important Mesopotamian concept in dealing with the future was *šīmtu*, a complicated concept of which 'fate' is the usual, but slightly misleading, translation:[68] *šīmtu* could, to some extent, be seen as being similar to the Greek *moira*—there are some matters which cannot be decided on, or influenced by, either man or the supernatural. *Šīmtu* (in a way similar to *moira*) did not imply that the future was completely predetermined, as is also testified by the existence of the *namburbû* ritual. This ritual has been described as "[. . .] measures for the elimination of the evil promised by the omens".[69] Individuals could perform such a ritual, asking the supernatural to change events which had been predicted to happen. The *namburbû* ritual was closely connected to divination and was used for individual but above all for the common good. For example, if it had been predicted that something would happen to an individual or to the land, a *namburbû* was performed to avert evil.[70] Apart from the normal *namburbû* which warded off a specific danger, there were also so-called *Universalnamburbû* which could be used to avert any future

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[65] Some secondary literature states that there are 'lucky' and 'unlucky' days, marked as such in hemerologies. This has not primarily to do with chance—but with favourability.

[66] The words which are usually translated as 'luck' refer to luck as in happiness; that good things happen to you (*damiqtu*); that you have or obtain a protective god (*angubbû, ilānû; lamassu; rašû*); experience good fortune because of divine favour (*damāqu; dumqu; ilu; mašru*)—these categories also overlap—or the same but in a negative sense (*lemnu*).

[67] Cf. *CAD* s.v. *egirrû*.

[68] The one article on this topic is: Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination', 363–371. See 363 on difficulties with the term.

[69] J. Bottéro, Z. Bahrani & M. Van De Mieroop, *Mesopotamia: reading, writing and the gods* (Chicago 1992) 154. Note that it could also be used to ensure the extispicy ritual went well: Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 465.

[70] Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*; R.I. Caplice, *The Akkadian namburbi texts: an introduction* (Los Angeles, 1974). For another example see SAA 10 10 5–rev. 5.

danger, even leaving that danger unspecified.[71] One special case is the ritual of the substitute-king. If a negative sign had been observed, a substitute-king would be placed on the throne and the evil would be deflected towards this substitute, instead of towards the real king.[72] As the king was the personification of the land and social order was dependent on the king, this kind of ritual was a tool for averting communal uncertainty. All this results in a very important observation: although the Mesopotamian future was laid out in advance, it could still be changed.

Viewing the future as such does not leave much room for chance (although it will have existed). Even the dice were sometimes thought to be predictive. Throwing the dice during a game in Mesopotamia, which was theoretically based on chance, could be a throw closely connected to the future:

> If the astragals score 2,
> the Swallow sits at the head of a rosette (or: at the first rosette).
> Should it (then) land on a rosette, a woman will love those who linger in a tavern; regarding their pack, well-being falls to them.
> If it does not land on a rosette, a woman will reject those who linger in a tavern; regarding their pack, as a group well-being will not fall to them.[73]

At first glance, an important role of chance implies a belief in an empty future in which random and unpredictable events will take place; if chance seems less important, this implies the idea of a future in which events will occur which can be known (and perhaps be changed or manipulated). Yet, the two kinds of uncertainty could easily exist side by side: the ordinary Greek, Roman or Mesopotamian individual was generally not concerned about this paradox. From an etic perspective, too, the two categories do not exclude each other but are indeed inextricably linked to one another.[74] What must be emphasized is that each cultural area appears to have had its own specific mix of the ways uncertainty was seen: although

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[71] See for some examples Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*, 467–502.

[72] See among many other sources, the brief summary of this ritual practice in: Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 78; 222–223. See for a letter telling the king about such issues SAA 10 25.

[73] BM33333B rev. i 9–15. Edition and transliteration Finkel, 'On the rules for the royal game of Ur', 20 and 29. *šum$_4$-ma* ZI.IN.GI.MEŠ 2 TA.ÀM | *it-tab-ku-nim* SIM.MUŠEN *ina* SAG SÙR TUŠ-*ab* | SÙR E$_{11}$-*ma* MUNUS *ina* É [KAŠ].TIN.NAM *a-šá-bi* | *i-ra-mu* (sic) ⌜KASKAL⌝.KUR-*su-nu šu-lum šá-kin-šu-nu-tu* | *šum$_4$-ma* SÙR *la* E$_{11}$ MUNUS *ina* É KAŠ.TIN.NAM | *a-šá-bi i-ze-er* KASKAL.KUR-*su-nu* | DIŠ-*niš* SILIM *ul šá-kin-šu-nu-tu*.

[74] Cf. p. 207 n. 55.

chance seems unlikely to have played an important role in Mesopotamia, it was certainly very prominent in Greece and Rome. Moreover, this contrast grew progressively more pronounced after more emphasis came to be placed on the idea of chance between Archaic and Hellenistic times. This development is reflected in growing concerns about chance occurrences taking place: chance was fickle, could not be relied upon and could not be controlled. This affected the way individuals attempted to get a grip on their uncertainty.

Divination

How did divination serve to get a grip on uncertainty in the three cultural areas? The exact way the supernatural was questioned differed: asking the supernatural for advice (for example, what is best?) indicates a different basis of uncertainty because it leaves room for chance, whereas asking for a prediction (and hence knowledge of future events, for example, will x happen?) presupposed that the future could be known, as do indicative questions—general questions about the future (for example, 'shall I be happy?'), because these contain a predictive element. The third category (for example, 'which god shall I sacrifice to?') in which a specific answer is required is the instructive category, also indicating the existence of an idea that uncertainty could be taken away. Information about past occurrences may be asked for ('What have I done wrong?'), but these questions are about the past and are therefore of a different nature. The questions about the future reveal the cultural mix of the way individuals tried to get a grip on future uncertainties and how divination worked to diminish or even resolve these.

Asking for Advice and Instructions

For Greece, the starting point of my investigation lies in the oracular questions, especially those contained in the corpora from Delphi and Dodona. The latter collection is important because it is so closely connected to actual divinatory practice; the former because it might help us to confirm or modify conclusions reached on the basis of the Dodonaic materials. For Delphi, I have based my analysis on the so-called historical questions as identified by Joseph Fontenrose.[75] I consider both sets of oracular

[75] Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 39; 440–442.

materials to be strong indications of what was and what was not asked in Greek divinatory practice in general in the Classical and Hellenistic periods.[76]

The first category of questions is illustrated by the following Dodonaic example from Eidinow's catalogue:

> Good fortune. Whether I would do better travelling to where it seems good to me, and doing business there, if it seems good, and at the same time practicing this craft.[77]

Will it be better for the questioner if he performs a particular action or makes a particular choice? This question asks for an answer of an advisory nature: the purpose is to ask the supernatural to guide the individual in a decision which needs to be made (rather than to reveal the future to him).

The second category is that of the instructive questions in which the oracle is asked to supply the enquirer with such replies as to which god he should offer or which other specific actions he should perform. These questions differ from the advisory ones in the sense that the supernatural is perceived to give a specific command about what to do. An example of an instructive question is 'Which god should I sacrifice to?' Here we see that uncertainties could be dissolved through the gaining of knowledge, as it is in the next two categories.

Apart from these advisory and instructive questions, there are also other kinds of questions, such as 'Shall I be happy?' and 'Shall I have children?' These questions are concerned with issues about which the individual feels powerless (such as happiness or begetting children). They contain a predictive element but the supernatural is not specifically asked to look into the future: the question is general and the timeframe vague. I therefore categorize these questions as 'indicative'.

The last category in these Greek oracular materials consists of requests for information about the truth in both past and present: 'Who were the parents?' and 'What is the truth about X?' are examples of such questions. Their purpose is to obtain knowledge. Pertinently, it should be noted that these questions are not about the future: where the Greek past and present

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[76] Although a small number of oracles are to be dated in the Roman period this does not affect the argument.

[77] Translation (and bibliography concerning this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 97 (number 9). Τύχα ἀγαθά. Ἦ τυγχάνοιμί κα ἐμπορευόμενος | ὅπυς κα δοκῆι σύμφορον ἔμειν, καὶ ἄγων, τῆι κα δοκῆι | ἅμα τâι τεχναι χρεύμενος.

are concerned, knowledge is asked for, whereas the more future-oriented questions tend to seek advice and instruction.

Now for a more quantitative analysis, in so far as this is possible.[78] Building on the four categories just defined, the questions are categorized according to whether they are advisory, instructive, indicative or predictive. The percentages for Delphi are as follows: Fontenrose has dealt with seventy-five historical oracles.[79] Of these, thirty-three are of an advisory nature (44 percent).[80] Thirty-one are instructive (41.3 percent).[81] Only four are indicative (5.3 percent).[82] Only two ask for information about both past and present (2.7 percent),[83] leaving another five (6.7 percent) which could not be assigned to these categories).[84]

A study of the Delphic historical materials reveals that the Greek gods mainly gave advice and instructions with regard to future uncertainties. Do the Dodonaic materials show the same pattern? In Lhôte's 152 questions from the Dodonaic materials (in which 187 questions are asked but thirty-five cannot be assigned to any category because they are illegible),[85] there are more questions of the indicative type than there are in Delphi (and even some exceptional ones which might be called predictive): thirty-five in total (23 percent).[86] Instructions are given on thirty-one tablets (20.4 percent),[87] whereas a great number of questions is advisory in nature: seventy-three in total (48 percent).[88] Two tablets combine

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[78] I am aware that there is a small corpus of questions only and that this is problematic when taking a quantitative approach. The percentages as given below are therefore only an indication of a trend which can be seen in the sources.

[79] These are from different times—the common factor they share is that they were written down relatively soon after they were pronounced, which lowers the chance that they were falsified or twisted for a rhetorical purpose.

[80] H 1; 2; 4; 5; 6; 13; 17; 19; 20; 21; 25; 27; 29; 32; 33; 36; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 45; 46; 47; 49; 55; 59; 61; 62; 64; 66; 74.

[81] H 7; 8; 9; 10?; 11; 12; 14; 15; 16?; 23; 24; 26; 28; 30; 31; 35; 37; 44; 48; 50; 51; 52; 53; 54; 56; 57; 58; 60; 67; 68; 71.

[82] H 18?; 34?; 70; 75.

[83] H 65; 69.

[84] H 3; 22; 63; 72; 73.

[85] Lhôte 4; 12; 15; 21; 23?; 24; 32; 40; 42; 59; 70; 76; 79; 99; 104; 113?; 136a; 142; 145; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150; 151; 152; 153; 155; 156; 161; 162; 164; 165; 166; 167.

[86] Lhôte 5; 6A; 10B; 13?; 18; 21; 22Bb; 26; 28B; 33B; 35A; 36A; 37; 39; 43; 44; 45; 46A; 51; 53Bb; 55; 58A; 63; 73; 82; 83; 84; 87; 88; 94; 109?; 118; 131; 140; 141.

[87] Lhôte 1; 2; 3; 7; 8A; 17; 19; 20; 22A; 35B; 36Bb; 38; 41; 46Ba; 47; 49bis; 50Aa; 65; 66; 67; 68A; 72; 101; 102; 107A; 110; 116; 131; 138; 143; 157?

[88] Lhôte 6B; 8B; 9; 10A; 11; 16; 22Ba; 25; 27; 28A; 29; 30; 31; 33A; 34; 46Bb; 50Ab; 50B; 53Aa; 53Ac; 54; 56; 57; 58B; 60; 61B; 62?; 64?; 68B?; 69; 71?; 74; 75; 77?; 78?; 80; 81; 85; 86; 89; 90; 91; 92; 93; 95; 96A; 97; 98; 100; 103; 105; 106A; 106B; 108?; 111; 112; 114; 115?; 117; 127; 128; 129; 130; 133; 134?; 137; 139; 144; 154; 158; 159; 160; 163.

prediction and instruction (1.3 percent).[89] The last category consists of questions concerning both past and present, of which there are eleven in the Dodonaic corpus (7.2 percent).[90] Although there are more indicative questions at Dodona than at Delphi, the questions most often asked at both oracles are above all advisory.

The assumption that Greek people tended to use divination to obtain *advice* from the supernatural is confirmed by the evidence relating to the outcome of extispicies. Although we are still rather in the dark about how his questions were phrased, Xenophon's extispicies normally seem to indicate '(un)favourability', but it is often uncertain whether this concerns a particular action he wants to undertake or if he is asking a sign from the supernatural indicating general favourability. It is true that some favourable signs are seen as providing a positive background to specific actions. This connection is exemplified by the following passage: "[. . .] our sacrificial victims were favourable, the bird-omens auspicious, the omens of the sacrifice most favourable; let us advance upon the enemy [. . .]."[91] Importantly the supernatural does not predict or say that Xenophon will win this battle: it merely advises that it is favourable to advance now. Everything else, including the outcome of battle, is still dependent on other factors, such as chance.[92]

It should be noted that numerous Greek literary sources explicitly indicate predictive divination. One example is the following: Homer relates Penelope's spontaneous dream which was interpreted in such a way that it applied to her situation. She now knew that Odysseus was coming home:

> But come now, hear this dream of mine, and interpret it for me. Twenty geese I have in the house that come forth from the water and eat wheat, and my heart warms with joy as I watch them. But forth from the mountain there came a great eagle with crooked beak and broke all their necks and killed them; and they lay strewn in a heap in the halls, while he was borne aloft to the bright sky.[93]

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[89] Lhôte 48; 52.

[90] Requests for truth and so on. Lhôte 14; 49; 107B; 119; 120; 121; 123; 124; 125; 125bis; 126.

[91] Xen. *An.* 6.21.2–3. Translation C.L. Brownson. τά τε ἱερὰ ἡμῖν καλὰ οἵ τε οἰωνοὶ αἴσιοι τά τε σφάγια κάλλιστα.

[92] In the case of unfavourable signs, rituals could be performed, too.

[93] Hom. *Od.* 19.535–540. Translation A.T. Murray. ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον. | χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐείκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν | ἐξ ὕδατος, καί τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα· | ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης | πᾶσι κατ' αὐχέν' ἔαξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ' ἐκέχυντο | ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροις', ὁ δ' ἐς αἰθέρα δῖαν ἀέρθη.

On the basis of the epigraphical evidence, it appears that Greek predictive divination did not occur as regularly as the literary sources suggest. It must not be overlooked that predictions from the supernatural were a particularly good literary or rhetorical device. Also, when the author and his audience were looking back on a particular situation the outcomes of events were already known—the idea that everything had gone according to the plans of the supernatural, must have been an attractive thought. Although literary heroes were perceived to have been able to procure knowledge of the future, the materials from Dodona and Delphi are, in my opinion, a more trustworthy indication of the advisory way in which Greek divination functioned: advice from the supernatural leaves room for chance—suggesting that a large component of Greek uncertainty was based on the idea that chance played an important role and that the future as such could generally not be predicted.

Very Instructive

Because we do not have any corpus of materials susceptible to quantitative analysis, any conclusions about the types of questions most commonly asked in Roman divination must be impressionistic to some extent. Despite this hitch, it seems possible to conclude that, as in Greece, Roman divination was used as a tool to obtain advice but also and above all to ask the supernatural for instructions.

The auspices and *prodigia* provide an interesting combination of functions of Roman divination in getting a grip on uncertainty. The advisory element can be seen in the Roman sources when the auspices are taken:

> The consuls were busy with matters pertaining to gods and to men, as they are wont to be on the eve of an engagement, when the envoys from Tarentum approached them to receive their answer; to whom Papirius replied, "Tarentines, the keeper of the chickens reports that the signs are favourable; the sacrifice too has been exceedingly auspicious; as you see, the gods are with us at our going into action." He then commanded to advance the standards, and marshalled his troops, with exclamations on the folly of a nation which, powerless to manage its own affairs, because of domestic strife and discord, presumed to lay down the limits of peace and war for others.[94]

[94] Liv. 9.14.3–5. Translation B.O. Foster. Edition: Teubner. agentibus divina humanaque, quae adsolent, cum acie dimicandum est, consulibus Tarentini legati occursare responsum expectantes; quibus Papirius ait: 'auspicia secunda esse, Tarentini, pullarius nuntiat; litatum praeterea est egregie; auctoribus dis, ut videtis, ad rem gerendam proficiscimur'. signa inde ferri iussit et copias eduxit, vanissimam increpans gentem, quae, suarum

The auspices were taken to ensure that a particular action would be as successful as possible, but this is not to say a definitive outcome had been decided. Chance played its part. The importance of chance is also revealed at oracle sites at which cleromancy was practised. For example, at the sanctuary of Praeneste, while the lot was apparently drawn by a small child, Fortuna was in charge, allowing for a maximum 'randomization'.[95] These cleromantic activities are another illustration of the way Roman man embraced uncertainty on the basis of chance, and how he simultaneously strove to diminish it: "[…] dice could be used not only to expose uncertainty, but also to resolve it".[96] Using cleromancy under the auspices of the goddess of chance, the individual knowingly increased uncertainty by relying on the goddess to steer the divinatory process—hoping that chance would provide information.

Prodigia served to let the individual and community know what was wrong, for example, that the *pax deorum* had been disturbed: this type of information was instructive. The sign—or rather its interpretation—revealed the existence of an as yet unknown uncertainty or problem because the supernatural had been angered. Expiation of the sign would resolve the previously unknown problem: the supernatural instructed the individual about what he should do by providing a sign.

> A wall and a gate had been struck by lightning; and at Aricia even the temple of Jupiter had been struck by lightning. Other illusions of the eyes and ears were credited as realities. An appearance as of ships had been seen in the river at Tarracina, when there were none there. A clashing of arms was heard in the temple of Jupiter Vicilinus, in the territory of Compsa; and a river at Amiternum had flowed bloody. These prodigies having been expiated according to a decree of the pontiffs, […].[97]

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inpotens rerum prae domesticis seditionibus discordiisque, aliis modum pacis ac belli facere aequum censeret. Another good example is, e.g., Cic. *Verr*. 2.1.104.

[95] Tyche appears in the late dice oracle texts see, e.g, Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 133. It is interesting in this respect that it has been argued that *kindunos* 'danger' and the worst throw of the dice 'the dog', are etymologically connected. But according to J. Knobloch, 'Griech. κίνδυνος m. Gefahr und das Würfelspiel', *Glotta* 53 (1975) 78–81, the theory should be rejected.

[96] Beard, 'Risk and the humanities', 99.

[97] Liv. 24.44.8–9. Translation D. Spillan & C. Edmonds. Murus ac porta Caietae et Ariciae etiam Iouis aedes de caelo tacta fuerat. et alia ludibria oculorum auriumque credita pro ueris: nauium longarum species in flumine Tarracinae quae nullae erant uisas et in Iouis Vicilini templo, quod in Compsano agro est, arma concrepuisse et flumen Amiterni cruentum fluxisse. his procuratis ex decreto pontificum […].

In Rome, taking the auspices served to obtain advice about how to do the right thing at the right time. In other words, by taking the auspices one chose the best future, implying the existence of options which remained unknown. By providing advice, divination supplied the certainty that the best option had been chosen or the best possible action had been taken at the best possible time. *Omina* revealed that something negative was about to happen, but there could still be time to change things. Both the auspices and *omina* transformed fear of uncertainties into hope that something positive had been or could be done—without eliminating these uncertainties. Uncertainties were addressed in another way, too, mainly by asking instructive questions: knowledge of what to do in the present was obtained and this seems to have played a relatively larger role than it did in Greece.

Asking for Predictions

The Neo-Assyrian queries addressed to the sun god during extispicy show that Mesopotamia differed from Greece and Rome in a remarkable way.[98] Although advisory and instructive questions are recorded and indicative questions must have existed (second millennium sources show that individuals would ask indicative questions)—these are largely absent from the Neo-Assyrian materials. An overwhelming part of the surviving queries for the purpose of extispicy cannot be called anything but predictive: the gods were asked to provide a 'judgement' about what would happen in reply to the question, in the shape of a divinatory sign—in this way the individual would gain perceived knowledge and uncertainties related to the future were eliminated.

At this point, I shall provide an example of a query beginning with a request for advice or instruction which might also have been encountered in Greece or Rome (first part, should Esarhaddon send troops?). Then follows the part of the question asking for a prediction of future events, even within a specified time frame (second part, will the others then band themselves together?):

> Should he send men, horses and troops, as he wishes, to Siriš? Is it pleasing to your great divinity?
>
> If the subject of this query, Esar[haddon], king of Assyria, having planned, sends (them), will the people of Siriš, or the Manneans, or the *Ridaeans*,

[98] Starr, *Queries*. The *tamītu* texts support this notion.

> or any (other) enemy, from this day to the day of my [stipu]lated term, *band themselves together into an army* (against) the army he is sending to [Siriš]?[99]

This question asks for both advice and a prediction and shows the two main varieties in Mesopotamian questions. Yet, people felt that the gods could say something (semi-)definite about the future, this must have been the preferred option. Questions directed exclusively towards obtaining advice are a real minority and predictive questions assume a much more important place.

It is, again, possible to take a quantitative view, taking into account that the amount of data is not large enough to draw definitive conclusions (and that indicative questions are likely to be under-represented). From 354 queries 152 are too fragmentary to provide enough indication of what kind of question was asked and what kind of answer was expected.[100] Of the 202 remaining queries, only 30 (14.9 percent) ask for advice;[101] another 66 (32.7 percent) ask for advice and prediction as in the example above;[102] 106 (52.5 percent) of the queries are purely predictive.[103] In short, more than half of the queries are purely predictive, and one-third combines

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[99] SAA 4 28 8–12. Translation (the italicized words in the translation are uncertain) and edition I. Starr. ERIM.MEŠ ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ Á.KAL *mál* ŠÀ-*ba-šú ub-lam a-na* KUR*si-ri-iš liš-*⌜*pur*⌝ | UGU DINGIR-*ti-ka* GAL-*ti* DÙG-*ab* GIM *ik-*⌜*pu-du*⌝*-ma il-tap-ru* EN—MU. MU NE-*i* mAN.ŠÁR—[ŠEŠ—SUM-*na*] | LUGAL KUR—AN.ŠÁR TA UD-*mu* NE-*i* EN *mál* UD ⌜*mu*⌝ [*ši*]-⌜*kin*⌝ RI-*ia* Á.KAL *mál a-na* URU[*si-ri-iš*] | *i-šap-pa-ru lu-ú* KUR*si-ri-iš-a-*[*a lu*]*-ú* LÚ*man-na-a-a lu-ú* LÚ.RI!-⌜da?⌝-[a-a] | *lu-ú* LÚ.KÚR *a-a-um-ma* [*a*]-⌜*na*⌝ *mim-ma* Á.⌜KAL⌝ [*i-kàt*]*-ti-ru-ni-i lu-ú* ⌜ŠU⌝ [x x x].

[100] SAA 4 13; 25; 26; 27; 46; 52; 54; 55; 70; 97; 106; 109; 112; 120; 121; 123(?); 125; 126; 127; 128; 135; 138; 146; 147; 179; 180; 181; 182; 184; 186; 189; 193; 194; 195; 198; 199; 200; 201; 202; 203; 204; 206; 207; 209; 210; 211; 212; 213; 214; 215; 216; 217; 218; 219; 220; 221; 222; 223; 224; 225; 226; 227; 228; 229; 230; 231; 232; 233; 234; 235; 236; 237; 238; 239; 240; 241; 242; 243; 244; 245; 246; 247; 248; 249; 250; 251; 252; 253; 254; 255; 256; 257; 258; 259; 260; 261; 269; 273; 277; 279; 283; 284; 291; 292; 294; 295; 296; 297; 298; 304; 308; 309; 311; 312; 313; 314; 316; 317; 318; 319; 323; 324; 325; 326; 327; 328; 329; 330; 331; 332; 333; 334; 335; 336; 337; 338; 339; 340; 341; 342; 343; 344; 345; 346; 347; 348; 349; 350; 351; 352; 353; 354.

[101] SAA 4 60; 76; 86(?); 95(?); 100(?); 101; 103; 105; 110; 114; 129; 130; 137; 148; 149; 167; 173; 175; 178; 196; 197; 262; 263; 264; 265(?); 266; 270; 278; 310; 315.

[102] SAA 4 8; 16; 24; 28; 30; 34; 51; 57; 58; 62; 63; 64; 65; 71; 78; 79; 81; 82; 83(?); 84; 85; 87; 88; 89; 90; 91; 94(?); 96; 99; 102; 104; 107; 108; 111; 113; 124; 150; 151; 152; 154; 156; 158; 159; 161; 163; 164; 166; 168; 169; 170; 171; 172; 174; 177; 185; 187; 267; 271; 272; 274; 287; 290; 299; 305; 306; 307.

[103] I have also included 'requests for truth' in this category (and not provided a separate category as in the Greek materials), as they are primarily directed towards the future—except number 74, which I have indicated by a question mark. SAA 4 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15(?); 17; 18; 19(?); 20; 21; 22(?); 23; 29; 31; 32; 33; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 47; 48; 49; 50; 53(?); 56; 59; 61; 66; 67; 68; 69(?); 72; 73; 74(?); 75; 77; 80; 92; 93; 98; 115; 116; 117; 118; 119; 122; 131; 132; 133; 134; 136; 139; 140; 141; 142; 143; 144; 145; 153; 155; 157; 160;

advisory with predictive elements. Even if the exact percentages were subjected to discussion,[104] these figures clearly demonstrate the prevalence of predictions in the Mesopotamian materials and the relative unimportance of purely advisory questions. In other words (and also throwing the missing indicative questions into the balance), in Mesopotamia, uncertainty based on the idea that chance played a role seems to have been less prevalent than in Greece. The king needed to know if he should order the execution of his plan, yes or no. He needed knowledge and it was thought it was possible to ask whether or not a specific event would occur within a specific timeframe: here the supernatural was asked to provide a predictive answer in the form of a judgement.

Other evidence concurs with the idea that indicative and predictive elements were very important in Mesopotamian divination. The compendia used to interpret signs other than those obtained through extispicy show that a sign was used to predict the future:

> If the smell of a man's house is like bitumen, grain and silver will be stolen from him.[105]

Leaving aside the possibility that events were explained in retrospect with the help of a divinatory text, the predictive goal of this text is clear.

The Mesopotamian tendency to ask for predictions and indications rather than advice can be plausibly connected with the telescopic function of Mesopotamian divination, which focuses on a specific timeframe. A good example of such telescopic thinking about knowledge (and time) is provided by the following question in which the expert asks whether or not the Scythians will perform a particular act, which is specified in great detail:

> [From this day, the 22nd day of this month, Sivan (III), to the 21st day of the following month, Tammuz (IV), of this year, for 30 days and nights], the stip[ulated term for the performance of (this) extispicy—within this stipulated term], will the troops of the S[cyth]ia[ns, which have been staying

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162; 165; 176; 183; 188; 190; 191; 192; 205; 208(?); 268; 275; 276; 280; 281; 282; 285; 286; 288; 289; 293; 300; 301; 302; 303; 320; 321; 322.

[104] Criticism of these calculations can arise on account of the fact that some information might have been lost when tablets were broken, I have categorized the queries on the basis of the text which has been published, taking into account Starr's supplements. Other passages are missing but if Starr has not supplemented them, I have not made any assumptions about these.

[105] *Šumma alu* tablet 6.113. Edition and translation: Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*, vol. 1. 118–119. DIŠ *e-ri-iš* É LÚ GIM ESIR ŠE.IM *u* KÙ.BABBAR *ša-ri-iq-šú*.

> in the district of Mannea and which are (now) moving out from the territory] of Mannea, strive and plan? Will they move out and go through the passes [of Hubuškia] to the city Harrania (and) the city Anisus? Will they take much plunder and heavy booty from the territory of [Assyria]? Does your great divinity [know it]?[106]

This way of questioning the gods implies that there was one particular future known to the supernatural, although this future might be changed by performing rituals, and also that uncertainty about the future existed and could be taken away by means of knowledge of the future gained by divination.

Towards an Uncertainty Analysis

Before proceeding towards an analysis of the above findings, a repeated *caveat* is in order: inconsistencies abound in the ways notions of chance and fate could exist next to one another. Still, these inconsistencies do not make the contrast between Mesopotamian and Greek and Roman conceptions of uncertainties any less real or less important. The ways in which future uncertainties were approached in Mesopotamia really differ from those in Greece and Rome. The Neo-Assyrian questions known to us are largely of the following type: 'Will a particular event happen within a particular space of time'—a question requiring a predictive answer. This is a much more explicit way of asking about the future than the greater part of questions asked in Greece and Rome.[107] The underlying assumption seems to have been that the Mesopotamian future was decided on by the supernatural, which could choose to inform humans of its decision: the future could become *known* to man. In Greece, advice (as well as instruction) tended to preponderate, whereas in Rome, divination appears to have been both advisory and instructive. The future remained unknown:

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[106] Note that this tablet is damaged—however, the phrasing is formulaic and therefore Starr has been able to provide a translation. SAA 4 23 2–10. Edition and translation: I. Starr. [TA UD *an-ni-e* UD-22-KÁM *šá* ITI *an-ni-e* ITI.SIG$_4$ *a-di* UD-21-KÁM] | [*šá* ITI TU-*ba* ITI.ŠU *šá* MU.AN.NA *an-ni-ti* 30 UD.MEŠ 30 MI.MEŠ] | *ši-*[*kin a-dan-ni* DÙ-*ti ba-ru-ti i-na ši-kin a-dan-ni šu-a-tú*] | LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ ⌜*iš*⌝-*ku-*[*za-a-a šá i-na na-gi-i šá* KUR*man-na-a-a áš-bu-ma* TA UGU *ta-ḫu-me*] | [*šá*] KUR*man-na-a-a* DU.MEŠ-*ku i-ṣar-*⌜*ri-mu-u i-ka*⌝-*pi-du-ú* TA *né-*⌜*ri-bi*⌝ [*šá* URU*ḫu-bu-uš-ki-a*] | [0] *a-na* URU*ḫar-ra-a-ni-a a-na* URU*a-ni-i-su-us* [x x x] | ⌜*uṣ*⌝-*ṣu-né-e* DU.MEŠ-*ku-né-e* TA UGU *ta-ḫu-me šá* [KUR—*aš-šur*.KI] | *ḫu-ub-tu ma-a'-du* NAM.RA *ka-bit-tu i-ḫab-ba-*[*tu-ú*] | *i-šal-lá-lu-ú* DINGIR-*ut-ka* GAL-*ti* [ZU-*e*].

[107] After completion of this research D. Zeitlyn published an article in which he provides a theoretical basis to my practical findings. See D. Zeitlyn, 'Divinatory logics: diagnoses and predictions mediating outcomes', *CurrAnthr* 53 (2012) 525–546, at 527.

man had to make *choices* on the basis of the advice that had been given. He had to make the best of it.

What does this imply for culturally specific ideas about the role of divination in dealing with uncertainties? In Greece (and to a lesser extent in Rome), the advisory function of divination did not transform uncertainties into certainties but worked as a tool to diminish fear and turn it into hope by providing advice about obtaining the best possible future from a great authority—the supernatural. Uncertainty was diminished, but not taken away. In Rome, instruction takes a greater place. In Mesopotamia, divination was used to obtain advice and instruction but very often also to obtain information about what was going to happen. In other words, Mesopotamian divination was a tool to eliminate uncertainty by obtaining perceived knowledge of the future. This is a real difference in the function of divination between the cultural areas. From the divinatory materials it would seem that Mesopotamian people appear to have believed that there was a future which could be known, shaped and controlled in particular ways, whereas most Greek and Roman futures seem to have come in multiple varieties. Although these could not be made known by means of divination, people could try to steer towards the best future available (whatever that future might have looked like)—by means of choices made on the basis of the outcomes of the divinatory process.

Concluding Observations

Divination was a tool for individuals to gain some grip on their futures. In Greece, there appears to have been multiple possible futures—from which man needed to choose the best. Fears about the future were turned into hope: man could hope to have made the right choice with the help of the supernatural in a world in which nothing was sure. In Mesopotamia, divination tended to be used to get to know the future (which could still be changed).

The ways ancient futures might have been conceived are not the main focus of this study. Nevertheless, some general conclusions can be drawn on the basis of divinatory materials. It should, first of all, be noted that sweeping statements about inhabitants of the ancient world being ruled by fate and predestination lack nuance. To judge from the divinatory materials, the ancient man-on-the-street had kaleidoscopic ideas about what the future looked like and how it could and should be considered and managed. Ideas about fate were undoubtedly present, but the evidence from

the divinatory materials allows the conclusion that ancient people were not so very different from us as it is often said they were: they too usually saw their future(s) as open-but-not-empty.[108] Of course, there were variations in *how* open and *how* empty that future was. In all ancient cases, something was there. The Greek and Roman individual might attempt to pick the best course in life, whereas the Mesopotamian individual might even have tried to obtain knowledge about what was in store for him—and then change it, if need be. The Mesopotamian future can be seen as one road, of which one section at a time could be made known to man, who could still influence its direction. Greek and Roman futures can be seen as multiple roads originating from a crossroads, among which man had to attempt to choose the best direction by means of divination, taking into account that chance would still play its part. Here, once again, Greek divination appears as a relatively flexible tool by which to discover a relatively flexible future.

[108] This term has been used to describe how modern man sees his future as 'open, but not empty' see M.B.A. van Asselt, A. Faas, F. van der Molen & S.A. Veenman (eds), *Uit zicht: toekomstverkennen met beleid* (Amsterdam 2010) 53–54; and continuing on this idea, most recently, B. Raessens, *Toekomstonderzoek: van trends naar innovatie* (Den Haag 2011) 17 and *passim*; Adam & Groves, *Future matters*, 17–38.

CONCLUSION

Divination was an omnipresent practice in the ancient world and the cultural areas investigated in this study—Greece, Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia and Republican Rome—were no exception. Signs were thought to come from the supernatural and, by interpreting these, humans hoped to gain information about the past, present and future. Divination was a way of receiving perceived information from the supernatural which could not, or only with difficulty, be otherwise obtained.

The principal aim of this study has been to determine what is specific to Greek divination and to offer a possible explanation of why this might be so. To discover what is specific requires comparison: similarities reveal general features of divination, whereas differences expose variations and specific characteristics. In applying this method, my aim has not been to demonstrate the 'uniqueness' of one of the three cultural areas. I have certainly not tried to outline some sort of evolutionary framework for the 'development' or 'transfer' of divination, but have attempted to shed light on how divination functioned in the three societies investigated.

Divination is considered as an essentially human phenomenon: in an etic sense, the perceived signs were simply occurrences onto which man projected supernatural origins and purposes. This meant that the divinatory process was a reflection of culturally defined values because, after all, it had been created by man. Therefore, an investigation of the similarities and differences between Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divination not only enlarges our understanding of divination, it also expands our knowledge of the societies in which it took place. Divination is inseparable from its societal context.

Before embarking on the comparison, an outline of the phenomenon of ancient divination was provided. It has been shown that the process of ancient divination consisted of the human observation, recognition/acknowledgement and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural. These signs could be concerned with past, present or future. There are three elements crucial to the functioning of this process: *homo divinans*, sign and text. At the outset of the divinatory process, an individual perceived an occurrence as a divinatory sign because he would, consciously or subconsciously and for whatever reason, judge an occurrence to have been caused by the supernatural. For instance, he might observe the

flight of a bird and recognize it as a sign, or might have heard an auditory sign (for example, the rustling of leaves in a tree). Although most of these signs could be evoked, they could also occur spontaneously. The second step in the process was the interpretation of the sign by a *homo divinans*, either the person who had initially recognized the sign or an expert who was called in on the basis of his expertise. The *homo divinans* would interpret the sign with the aid of 'text' in the widest sense of the word: from a written text such as a Neo-Assyrian compendium to an oral discourse which would have been part and parcel of a professional's appurtenances. His interpretation would imbue the sign with meaning.

Comparison of the three elements of divination—*homo divinans*, sign and text—reveals that especially the Mesopotamian but also the Roman experts investigated occupied a position relatively higher up on the socio-economic scale than their Greek counterparts did: the Mesopotamian experts were scions of specific scribal families, which were probably relatively well-off, having benefited from a sound education and enjoying regular employment. Roman (official) experts were born into the elite and were therefore high up the social scale (although this cannot be attributed to them being an expert), but those working in private divination, as most Greek experts, enjoyed no structured education, appointment or so on. Therefore, these latter experts had to assert their authority in different ways than the Roman official experts, who could claim authority on the basis of their descent, or those in Mesopotamia, whose authority was based on their training. The Greek expert (and the Mesopotamian and Roman unofficial experts) had to find employment and exuded an aura of authority by presenting himself to the public as the best expert around. This could bring fame and fortune, but most Greek experts will have remained relatively obscure. Unquestionably, the low degree of institutionalization did create an open and competitive context for Greek divinatory experts to operate in. In contrast, the high socio-economic status of the Mesopotamian and Roman official experts was largely attributable to the level of institutionalization of the environment in which such experts worked. Hence the different degrees of institutionalization lead to the making of an etic distinction between Greek *specialists* on the one hand and Mesopotamian *professionals* on the other—with the Roman experts positioned somewhere in between.

The relatively low level of institutionalization of divination in Greece also affected the expert's position in relation to his client and it isolated experts from political power. Since the Greek expert was incidentally

employed by his client on the basis of a symbiotic relationship which could be dissolved relatively easily, decision making and divination were not automatically integrated—instead individuals or communities would *choose* to use divination. The higher level of institutionalization would have provided a virtually unassailable guarantee that the Mesopotamian expert, once employed, would be structurally working for the king. The relationship between king and experts was both hierarchical and symbiotic. The experts did depend on the king for their income but the king could not make important decisions without consulting the experts. King and experts were mutually dependent on one another on a regular basis. In Rome, the most striking feature is that the official expert was a member of the political elite, so that experts and decision makers were linked by multiple ties. In a nutshell, the institutionalization of divination mattered because it determined the parameters of the interaction between decision maker and *homo divinans*.

Turning to the second focal point of my comparative enquiries, signs: an enormous variety of phenomena which might be recognized as carriers of messages from the supernatural can be observed, perhaps unsurprisingly. What is more interesting is that certain culturally specific preferences for particular types of sign can be observed. In Greece and in Rome most signs were thought to appear in natural objects, whereas in Mesopotamia they could also appear in, or be, manmade objects. This discrepancy is closely related to the perceived objectivity of the sign. How could ancient man be sure something was a sign from the supernatural and not one contrived or influenced by man? How would he know if it had been interpreted correctly? Often the need for an authority was felt in order to decide what was a sign, what was not and how it should be interpreted. In Greece, the *homo divinans* performed his commissions on the basis of his previous experience, whereas in Mesopotamia written texts and in Rome communal memories were primary factors. As they were semi-independent of man, text and communal memory ensured that both the recognition and the interpretation of a sign were perceived to be more 'objective'. On the other hand, the dearth of Greek written divinatory texts points to the existence of a predominantly oral divinatory culture. The *homo divinans* attributed meaning to the signs without reference to texts but by relying on his personal skills—so that the recognition and interpretation of signs were dependent on the individual. Some perceived objectivity or randomization was ensured by restricting the appearance of signs chiefly to natural mediums.

This oral divinatory culture also reflexts itself in the use of texts: there are no written ritual texts and questions were generally not recorded (and if they were, such as at Dodona, they were not archived). There is more to be said about text: the relative lack of written interpretative texts confirmed the relative importance of the Greek *homo divinans* because his personal opinion and experience weighed more heavily in the interpretative process. It would also—in Greek perception—leave room for suspicion about the intentions of the expert. In Rome and Mesopotamia, the signs were no clearer than they were in Greece—but in these two cultural areas, especially Mesopotamia, guidelines could be resorted to, an action which ensured perceived objectivity. This is not to say that written authoritative texts were dogmatic or canonized: in the very few cases in which a Greek guideline did exist, a new written text would be created if the old one was no longer thought efficacious. Thereafter, the two texts would be in competition with one another. The Romans simply tried to add to their old texts and in Mesopotamia a new written text would be produced to be used side-by-side with the old text. Especially in Mesopotamia the use of texts to achieve objectivity depended heavily on systematization, which was, in its turn, linked to a certain degree of institutionalization, even to the existence of a bureaucratic tradition in the field of divination.

Differences appear not just when the three main elements of divination are discussed, they are also clearly revealed in an analysis of the functions of divination. It has been shown that divination worked within a temporal framework, helping to get a grip on past, present and future. This happened in various ways in the three cultural areas. As far as time is concerned, Mesopotamian divination can be described as a device used to consider a relatively distant specific point in the future: it worked as a 'telescope' in time, from the present into the future. This telescopic view of divination implies that time was seen as something which could be bridged: time, to an extent, was something permeable. In contrast, Greek and Roman divination served to look upon and analyse the future as well as the present and the near past—where the time horizons were narrower in Rome than in Greece.

These findings about time match the way divination functioned as a tool for dealing with uncertainty. In Mesopotamia, divination worked in a partly advisory and partly indicative sense, but functioned predictively in the majority of queries. By using divination, Mesopotamian individuals could obtain knowledge about what would happen in the future. Hence Mesopotamian uncertainties about the future could be reduced, because it was believed that, through divination, the supernatural could reveal its judgements to mankind: to indicate those things which *would* happen. Nevertheless,

future events could be changed for the better by rituals: even though this might appear to be a contradiction, Mesopotamian divination was rooted in the conviction that the future could be both known and changed by ritual manipulations. In Greece and Rome this predictive function of divination was much less important while still uncertainty was reduced. The Greek and Roman supernatural would provide its advice, instructions or information, but would not predict: uncertainty was omnipresent in the Greek and Roman worlds. Consequently, in Greece and Rome divination was a tool for revealing and exploring future possibilities, whereas in Mesopotamia divination could divulge a probable future. All in all, analysis of the divinatory materials leads to the idea that Greek futures can be seen as various roads going off in different directions and the client as the person standing at a crossroads, attempting to pick the best path to take—the various roads are in competition with one another. The option of divinatory prediction allowed the Mesopotamian future to be seen as one ongoing road which, bit by bit, was made known to the individual (and the individual could influence its direction). Both Greek divination and Greek conceptions of the future appear to have been based on the idea of *choice:* an individual would choose when to use divination, would choose his freelance expert and would choose his best possible future on the basis of the advice obtained by divination.

On the basis of these observations Greek divination can be characterized as a competitive phenomenon but this idea can be taken one step further: divination was a flexible phenomenon, an appropriate instrument to deal with a flexible future. This flexibility is visible on a number of levels: individuals chose to consult the Greek supernatural, thereby using divination selectively. During the interpretation of a sign, the individual could opt to use an expert or to dispense with his services. If he chose to do so he could call on an expert of his own choice. This expert would interpret the sign, relying on his ideas and experience, as far as we know normally without the help of text or communal memory. As a rule, the supernatural gave advice which was, strictly speaking, not binding: the Greek future was not empty, but still open, flexible. While "ritual is an exercise in the strategy of choice", the choices of "what to include? What to hear as a message? What to see as a sign? What to perceive to have a double meaning? What to exclude? What to allow to remain as background noise?" were largely systematized in Mesopotamia.[1] Up to a point, the same could

[1] Quote from Smith, *Imagining religion*, 56.

be said of Republican Rome. One of the most striking features of Greek divination is that these choices remained individual ones.

Explanations for these differences must be sought in the contexts of the societies in which the divination took place.[2] My findings suggest that institutionalization is a core concept in answering such questions.[3] By institutionalizing divination, the Mesopotamian king and the Roman *nobiles* could claim access to the supernatural and restrict such access for others. Those who were not well connected or well-to-do were condemned to be content with—quite possibly—less well-qualified private experts who would have been consulted on an *ad hoc* basis, in the way divination took place in Greece. In Greece, no such concentration of power existed.[4] In a Greek society where *isonomia* was, at least in theory, at the basis of society, the relative lack of institutionalization and systematization of divination might be attributed to the idea that contact with the supernatural should take place in a way accessible to all and should not be the prerogative of a few.[5] This ideal was strived for by a high degree

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[2] Some have attempted to explain particular aspects of Greek divination by linking divination to its political context. Robin Osborne, for example, argues that divination had to be ambiguous because this would have enabled the democratic process to continue to function, despite the fact the supernatural had given its opinion because this opinion could be then interpreted according to the will of the majority: "[…] if democratic decisions could be declared wrong by superior authority how could confidence in democratic decision-making be maintained?" (R. Osborne, *Greece in the making, c. 1200–479 B.C.* (London 1997) 352 as cited in Bowden, *Divination and democracy*, 154–155). A similar thought can be found in Bremmer, 'Prophets, seers, and politics', 157–159. The idea has, however, been critically received: Bowden, *Divination and democracy*, 154–159 (and in the present work, the ambiguity of divination is disputed cf. p. 20 n. 7). Robert Parker provides a nuanced view of the relationships between divination and politics in his important article 'Greek states and Greek oracles', esp. 82–101; 102–105.

[3] On the importance of institutionalization, or a lack thereof, on developments in scholarship and more generally G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, reason and experience: studies in the origin and development of Greek science* (Cambridge 1979) 226–267; Lloyd, *The ambitions of curiosity*, 126–147.

[4] Power was dispersed: even in Bronze Age Greece, the many kings only exercised power over a small geographical area; the Classical polis ensured a division of power among its citizens; the powerful monarchs of the Hellenistic kingdoms might have attempted to institutionalize divination by centralizing it at their courts. Some argue that such a putative centralizing endeavor could have led to a decline in oracles. However, this must remain pure speculation: there is too little evidence to endorse this idea. See Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles', 102–105.

[5] P.J. Rhodes, 'Isonomia', *NewP*. Visited 31-10-2011. Cf. P.A. Cartledge, 'Greek political thought: the historical context' in: C. Rowe & M. Schofield (eds), *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman political thought* (Cambridge 2000) 11–22, at 15. Cf. M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the beginnings of the Athenian democracy* (Oxford 1969) 96–136. However, nuance with regards to its use is in place: according to Mogens Herman Hansen this happened in the political sphere (M.H. Hansen, *The Athenian democracy in the age of Demosthenes* (Cambridge, MA 1991) 81–85).

of flexibility and accessibility of divination: theoretically, all should have been able to consult the supernatural. The supernatural was thought to have left individuals relatively free to act on signs and each individual could choose his future from several options. Hence, divinatory practice had to be, and had to remain, flexible and open to innovation. The institutionalization of divinatory practices—resulting in the systematization of divination—was never prevalent in Greece.

These findings suggest that a more general investigation into levels of institutionalization in Greek religion would be a promising topic for further research. Another topic worth investigating further is ancient thought about the future, change and innovation as reflected in sources relating the daily experiences of ancient man. The outcomes of such investigations would not only be of interest to ancient historians, classicists or Assyriologists but also to those from outside these fields of study, such as social scientists.

A fundamental similarity between the three societies examined in this study is that they all used divination to obtain information from the supernatural. Nevertheless, many intriguing differences emerge among their various practices. I have shown how divination can be cast in various forms or shapes in different societies—which had their own views of past, present and future. It emerges from this study that institutionalization, or lack thereof, is a key concept for those hoping to understand this variety.

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